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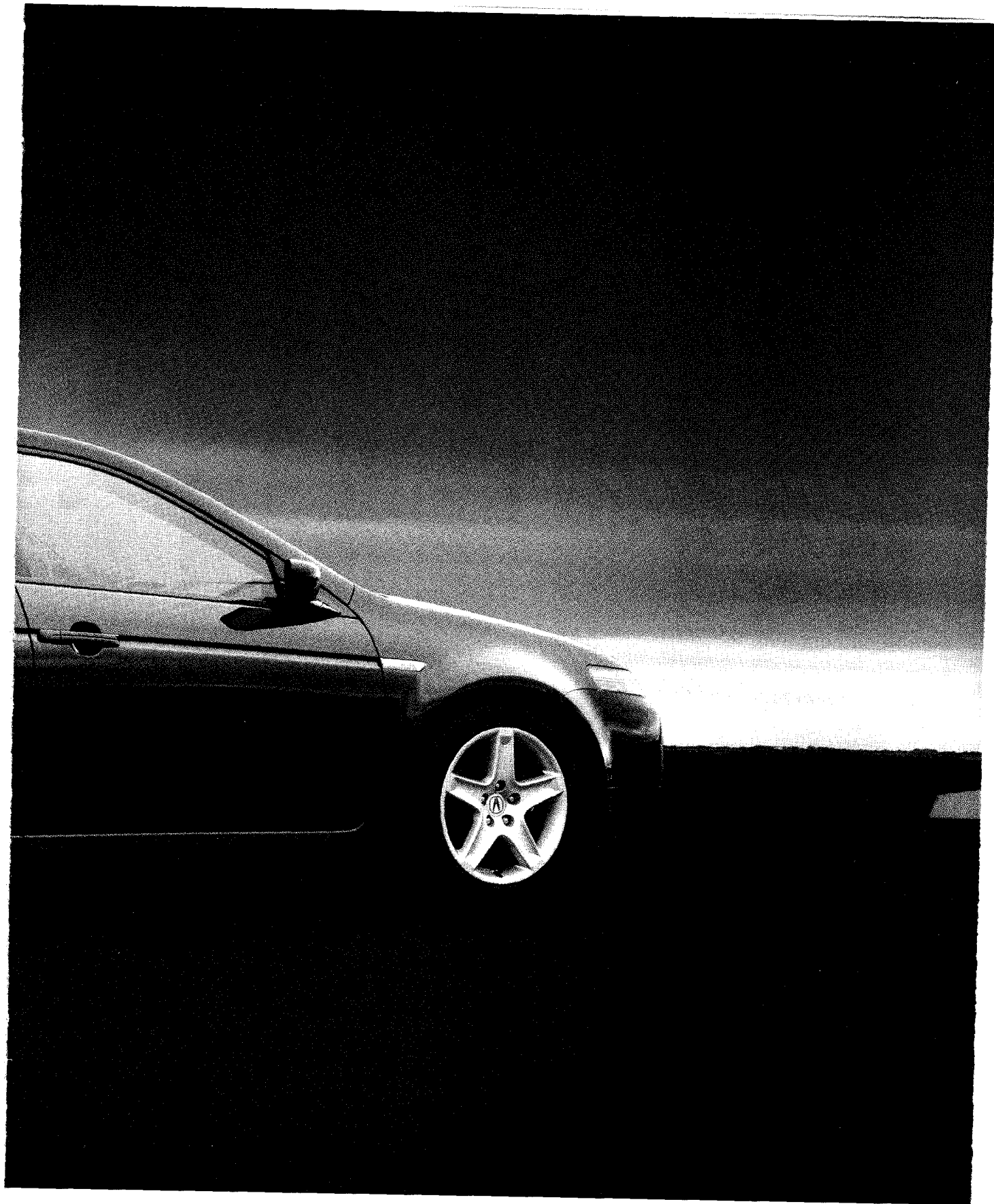
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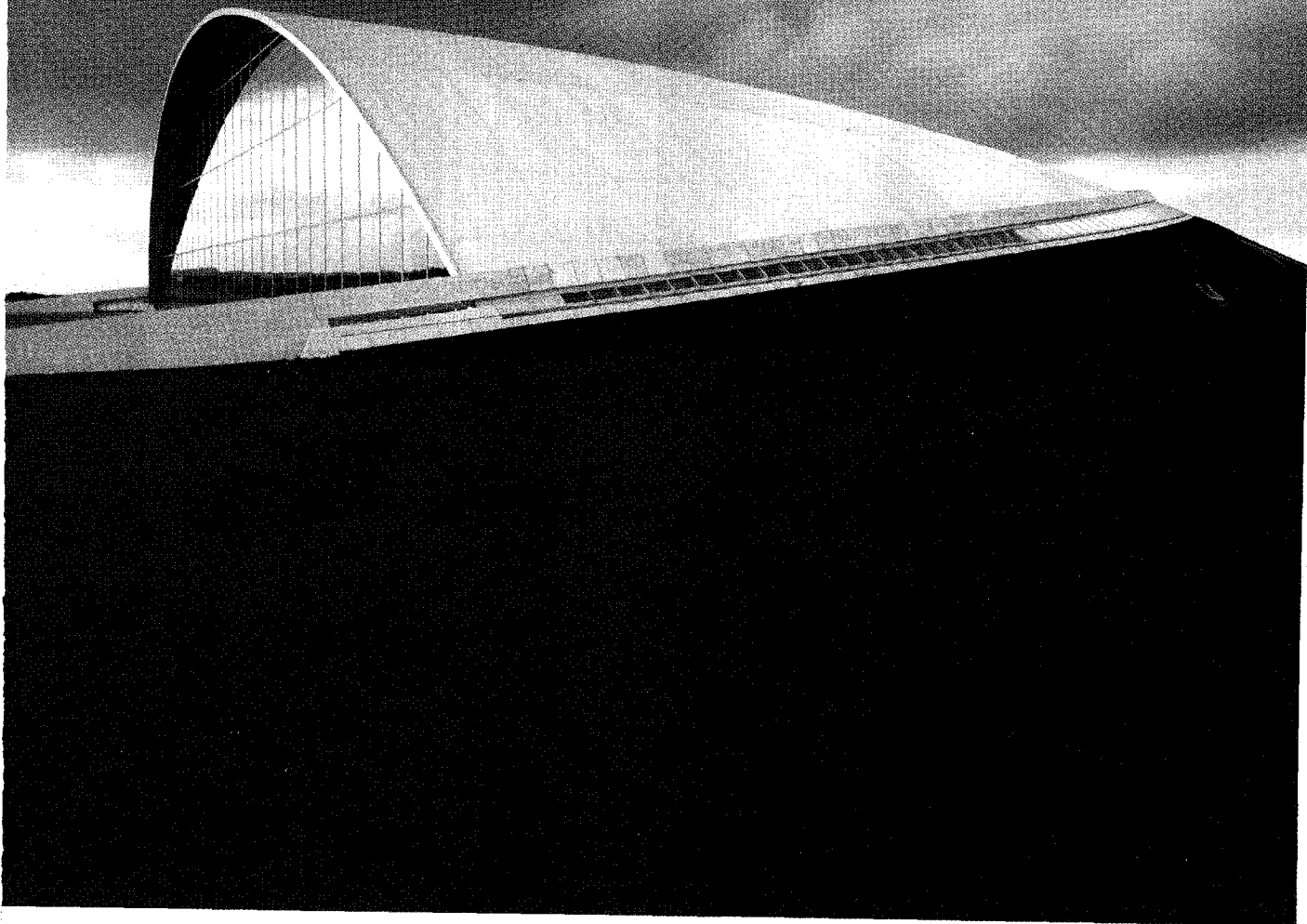
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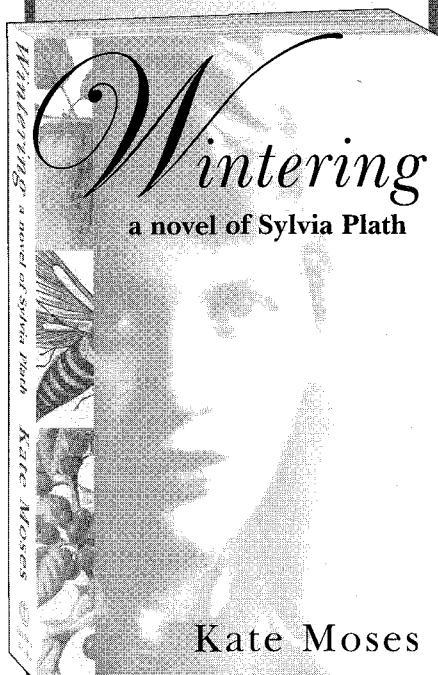


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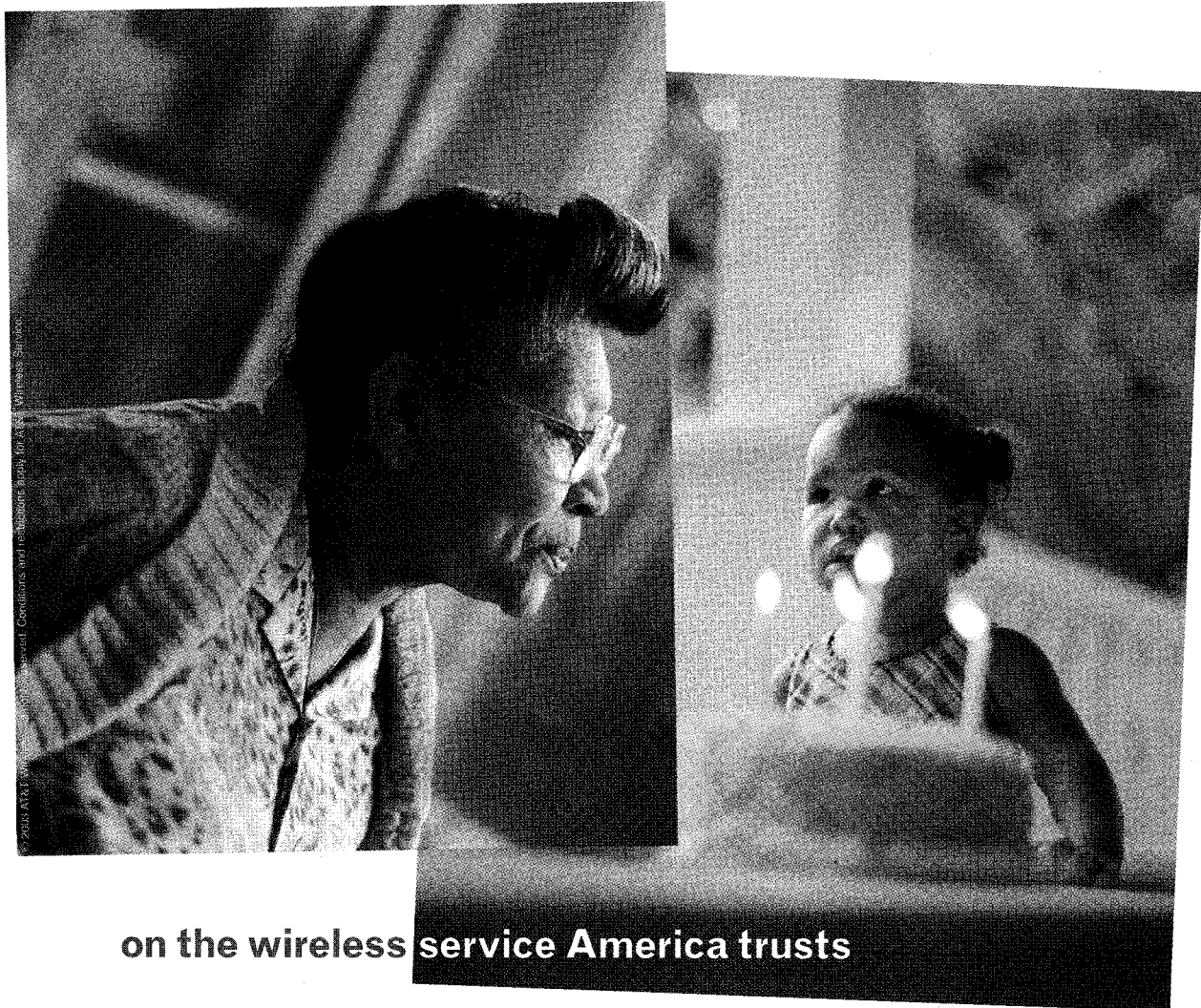
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CONTRIBUTORS

Hilton Als ("Ghosts in the House," p. 64; The Theatre, p. 108) is a staff writer and the author of "The Women."

Jeffrey Toobin ("End Run at Enron," p. 48) has published four books, including "A Vast Conspiracy" and "Too Close to Call."

Ian Frazier (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 56) is a longtime contributor to the magazine. His latest book, "The Fish's Eye," is available in paperback.

Judith Thurman ("Mother of Invention," p. 58) is the author of "Secrets of the Flesh: A Life of Colette."

Boris Fishman (The Talk of the Town, p. 41) edited "Wild East," a collection of stories about the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism, which came out this month.

Louise Erdrich (Fiction, p. 88), who published a memoir, "Books & Islands in Ojibwe Country," in June and "Original Fire: Selected and New Poems" in September, has a new novel, "Four Souls," coming out in 2004.

Seymour M. Hersh ("The Stovepipe," p. 76), whose books include "The Target Is Destroyed" and "The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House," is writing a book about the war on terrorism.

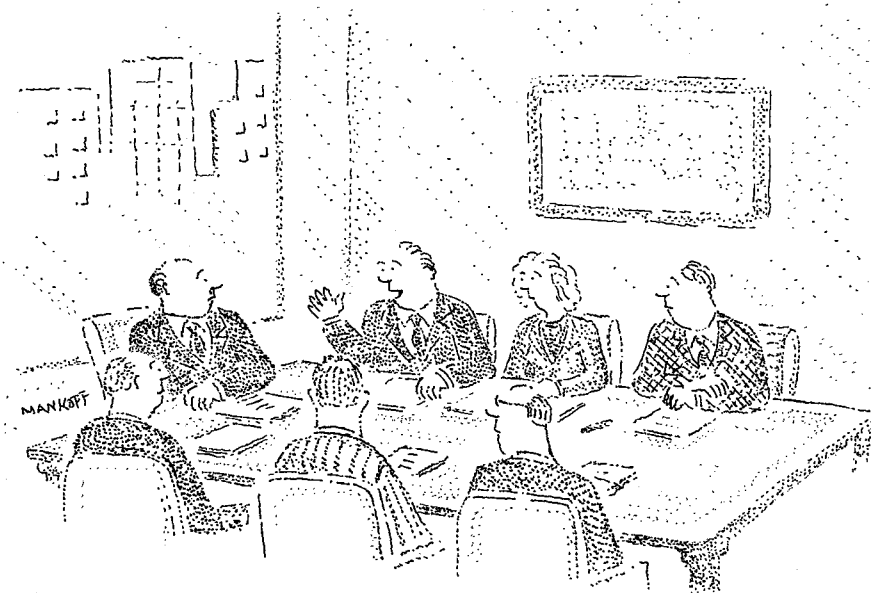
Mary Ellen Mark (Photograph, p. 82) has an exhibition of her work at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York.

Elizabeth Pierson Friend (Poem, p. 93), who died earlier this year, was an artist, a poet, and a teacher.

John Lanchester (Books, p. 98) is the author of three novels: "The Debt to Pleasure," "Mr. Phillips," and "Fragrant Harbor."

Joan Acocella (Dancing, p. 110) is a literary and dance critic for the magazine. Her book "Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism" is available in paperback.

Jack Ziegler (Cartoon, p. 86; The Back Page, p. 114) has been a contributor since 1974. "The Essential Jack Ziegler," a collection of cartoons, is his most recent book. ♦

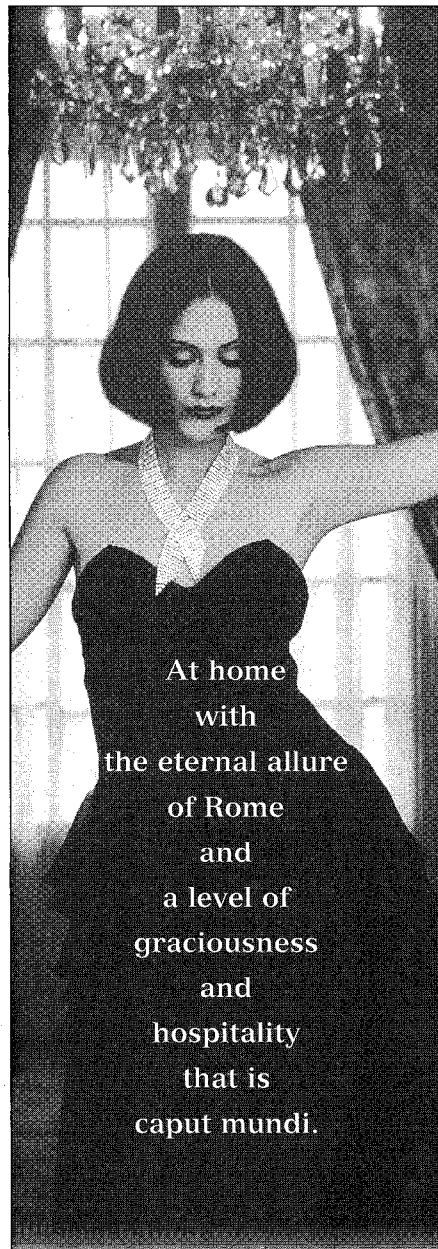


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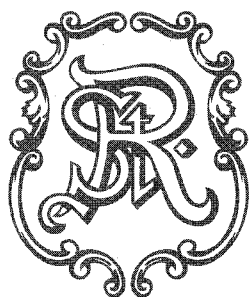
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FANTASY FOR SALE

During a trip to New York in 1917, Theodore Dreiser recorded in his diary, "We go across 34th and 5th Avenue, and up to 42nd looking in windows. Wonderful display." Adam Gopnik, in his piece on the passing of the department store, notes the heady combination of elaborate displays and large-scale show windows which characterized the late-nineteenth-century retailing boom ("Under One Roof," September 22nd). But the most important element of merchandising alchemy is fantasy. Early department stores were adept at creating theatrical environments, often borrowing their motifs directly from Broadway. In fact, New York's most celebrated window dresser at the turn of the century was L. Frank Baum—the author of the great American fantasy "The Wizard of Oz." Baum's legendary windows used a potent combination of color, design, and luxury to create an environment of stealthy, yet unmistakable desire. As Baum once noted, "It is said that people are not as readily deceived by window displays, but we all know better than this."

*Christina Rosenberger
New York City*

One factor that made the first department stores popular, as Gopnik points out, was their innovative use of uniform pricing. This became easier after 1863, when the greenback was made legal tender, creating a single national currency for the first time. Prior to that, private banks issued notes. All bank notes were said to be redeemable in gold, but this was not always the case, which meant that their value could vary considerably. Given that merchants never knew which notes they would be offered, it would have been risky to put price tags on anything.

*Robert C. Mason
Simi Valley, Calif.*

A FATAL BRIDGE

The Golden Gate Bridge is, as Tad Friend notes, widely known to inspire potential suicides to jump ("Jumpers,"

October 13th). With suicide one of the nation's top public-health problems—accounting for more than thirty thousand deaths yearly—it is a disgrace that the bridge's overseers, and the larger San Franciscan public, remain reluctant to erect barriers to deter jumpers there. This is especially so when one considers how effective barriers have been at other popular sites, such as the Empire State Building and the Sydney Harbor Bridge. Until San Franciscans can put aside their aesthetic, economic, and other reservations, and add effective barriers to their bridge, they will have failed to meet a civilized society's obligations to a very vulnerable group of people.

*William Feigelman
Professor of Sociology
Nassau Community College
Garden City, N.Y.*

Friend asks why the Golden Gate Bridge lacks a suicide barrier. But barriers come in many forms. Instead of spending millions of dollars erecting a physical barrier on the bridge, why don't we put money into comprehensive mental-health care, such as programs to help children discuss and deal with stress? It may be a lot more difficult, but, in the end, it might make a much bigger difference.

*Rebecca Jupiter
New York City*

One of the most telling aspects of the Golden Gate Bridge's suicide statistics Friend refers to is that only a small fraction of jumpers have met their demise from the west side of the bridge, looking toward the sea and the setting sun. Most have gazed back on the city as they leaped—perhaps to say goodbye, or perhaps to be sure they were seen.

*Malcolm Doak
Coram, N.Y.*

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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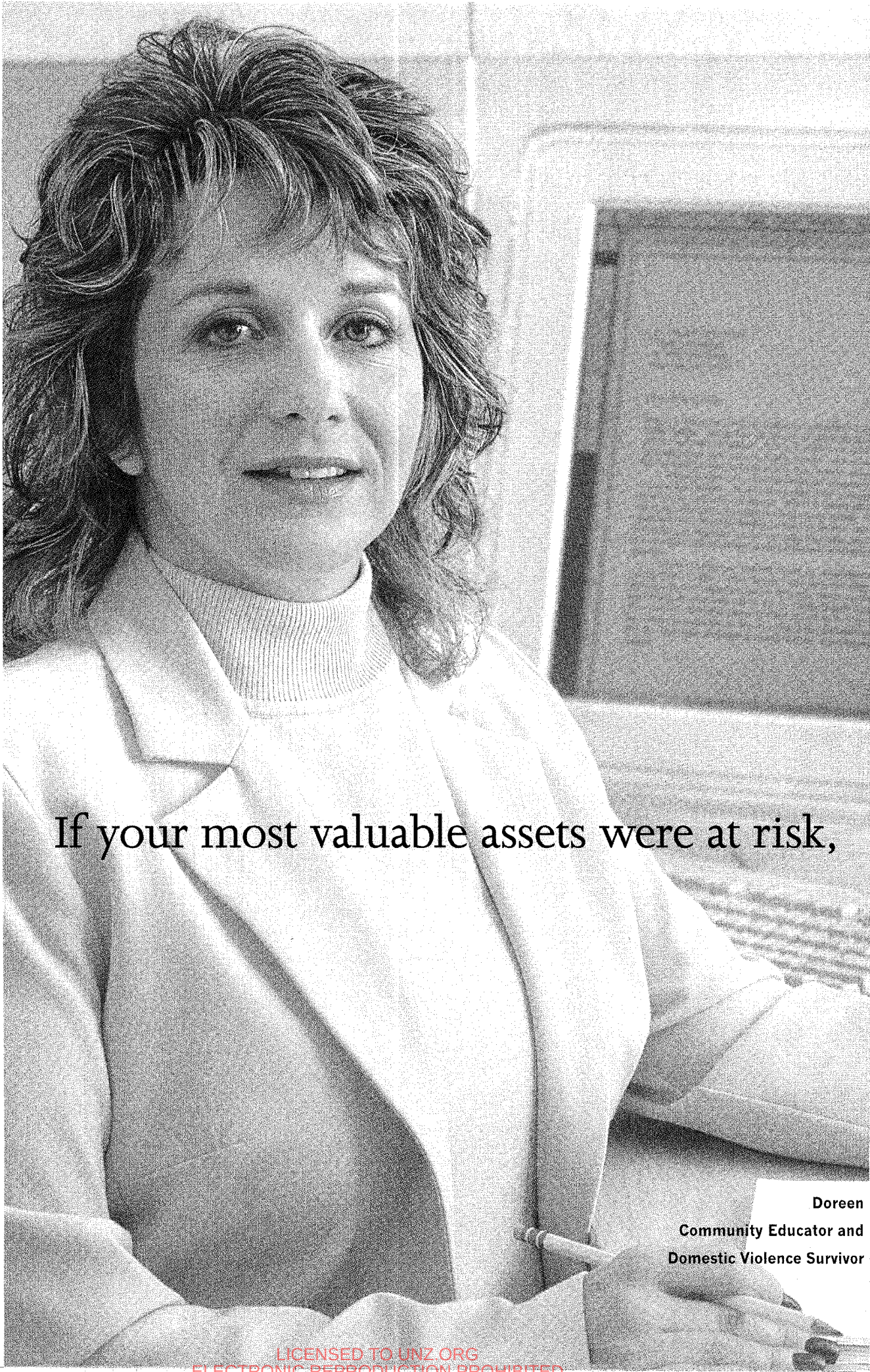
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BEYOND RECOGNITION

Christopher Burns, Michael Goduti, David Valcin, and Grant James Vargas star in a new play by John Petrick about a man who survives a brutal beating in Central Park. Directed by Kate Bushmann. One preview on Oct. 22. Opens Oct. 23 at 7:30. (Abingdon Theatre Arts Complex, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

BRIGHT IDEAS

M.C.C. Theatre presents a satire by Eric Coble, about parents who will stop at nothing to get their child into a selective preschool. Seana Kofoed and Paul Fitzgerald lead the cast. John Rando directs. Previews begin Oct. 22. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE CARETAKER

The Roundabout presents a revival of Harold Pinter's breakthrough 1960 play, starring Patrick Stewart, Kyle MacLachlan, and Aidan Gillen. Directed by David Jones. Previews begin Oct. 24. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

Ashley Judd, Jason Patric, and Ned Beatty star in a new production of Tennessee Williams's drama, directed by Anthony Page. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

FAME ON 42ND STREET

The movie that became a television series now becomes a musical, with a book by José Fernandez, lyrics by Jacques Levy, and music by Steve Margoshes. Directed by Drew Scott Harris and choreographed by Lars Bethke. In previews. (Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LONG CHRISTMAS RIDE HOME

A new play by Paula Vogel ("How I Learned to Drive") uses Bunraku-inspired puppets, designed by Basil Twist, to help tell the story of three siblings who hurtle into the future after a post-Christmas-dinner car accident. Randy Graff and Enid Graham lead the cast. Directed by Mark Brokaw, with sets by Neil Patel. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

NOBODY DON'T LIKE YOGI

Ben Gazzara stars as the legendary Yankees ballplayer Yogi Berra in a new play by Thomas Lysaght. Directed by Paul Linke. In previews. Opens Oct. 26 at 4. (Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES

Anthony Rapp stars in Oren Safdie's X-Acto sharp comedy about the pretense of the architectural establishment. The play, which had a brief and suc-

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cessful run last spring, is the inaugural production of the Theatre at the Center for Architecture. Directed by Maria Mileaf. Previews begin Oct. 24. (536 LaGuardia Pl. 212-239-6200.)

THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW

Eileen Atkins, John Lithgow, and Ben Chaplin star in a new play by William Nicholson, about a man who walks out on his marriage. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. Two previews on Oct. 22. Opens Oct. 23 at 6:30. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

SIX DANCE LESSONS IN SIX WEEKS

Polly Bergen and Mark Hamill star in a new play by Richard Alfieri, about the friendship between a Florida retiree and the dance teacher she hires, a jaded former New Yorker. Directed by Arthur Allan Seidelman. In previews. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

TABOO

In a musical about Boy George, the performance artist Leigh Bowery, and the flamboyant London club scene in the early eighties, Euan Morton plays the pop star and George O'Dowd (a.k.a. Boy George) plays Leigh Bowery. With a book adapted for the American stage by Charles Busch, and music and lyrics by O'Dowd. Directed by Christopher Renshaw and choreographed by Mark Dendy. Previews begin Oct. 24. (Plymouth, 235 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TATJANA IN COLOR

The Culture Project presents a new play by the prolific playwright Julia Jordan, set in Vienna in 1912, about a scandal surrounding the artist Egon Schiele and a young girl who modelled for him. Directed by Will Pomerantz. Previews begin Oct. 25. (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

THE VIOLET HOUR

A new play by Richard Greenberg ("Take Me Out"), about a young publisher and a mysterious machine, stars Robert Sean Leonard, Jasmine Guy, Scott Foley, Dagmara Dominczyk, and Mario Cantone. Directed by Evan Yionoulis. In previews. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

WICKED

Kristin Chenoweth, Idina Menzel, Norbert Leo Butz, Carole Shelley, and Joel Grey star in a new musical by Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman, based on Gregory Maguire's novel about the witches of Oz. Directed by Joe Mantello, with musical staging by Wayne Cilento. In previews. (Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.)

WILDER

A man who grew up in a bordello reflects on his lurid youth, in a new musical by Erin Cressida Wilson, Jack Herrick, and Mike Craver. John Cullum stars. Directed by Lisa Portes. In previews. Opens Oct. 26 at 7. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BECKETT/ALBEE

As portrayed by the incomparable Brian Murray and Marian Seldes, the He and She of Edward Albee's 1976 one-act play "Counting the Ways" don't exactly spar, but they do jostle. They're a well-bred, upper-middle-class Punch and Judy, wielding verbal bats, who are conducting an inquiry into the human heart almost as if neither of them had one. The actors play Albee's sadness over his disbelief in romantic love for what it's worth, which is a great deal. Beckett had a significant influence on Albee's style, and listening to the three short pieces by Beckett that constitute the first half of the program—"Not I," "Footfalls," and "A Piece of Monologue"—it's fairly easy to see why. Like Beckett, Albee makes language play on the listener's ear and in his imagination. Directed with great subtlety and care by Lawrence Sacharow. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/20/03.) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

BOLD GIRLS

Rona Munro's play depicts a day in the lives of four women in modern Belfast, struggling through life with absent men, too little money, and too much violence. Often wrenching, it's just as often funny. Directed by Ludovica Villar-Hauser. (29th Street Rep, 212 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444. Closes Nov. 1.)

THE BOY FROM OZ

Hugh Jackman stars in a new musical about the Australian pop star Peter Allen. Directed by Philip Wm. McKinley. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

CABIN IN THE SKY

Mel Miller's nostalgic Musicals Tonight! series begins the season with a staged concert of the 1940 morality tale about a troubled marriage in the rural South, with songs by Vernon Duke. (14th Street Y, 344 E. 14th St. 212-868-4444. Closes Nov. 9.)

CLOSET CHRONICLES

Eric R. Pfeffinger's spry comedy traces the effect that a son's coming out has on his conservative Midwestern family over three holidays. As the Angells swing between shock, disapproval, and grudging acceptance, Marilyn Sokol is touching as the matriarch, who wears a perpetual toothy smile to mask her feelings of impending doom. "We're trying to learn about your people," she tells her son at Christmas

WILLIAM STEIG, 4/18/83



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dinner. "We bought a Melissa Etheridge CD." Directed by Ben Hodges. (Ground Floor, 312 W. 11th St., between Greenwich and Hudson Sts. 212-352-3101. Closes Nov. 2.)

THE COLLEEN BAWN

The Irish Rep presents an 1860 melodrama by Dion Bouicault about a love triangle between two girls—one highborn, one lowborn—and a down-on-his-luck aristocrat. Directed by Charlotte Moore. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

GOLDA'S BALCONY

In William Gibson's one-woman play about Golda Meir—the Russian immigrant from Wisconsin who helped create the state of Israel and eventually became its Prime Minister—Tovah Feldshuh shows how national and family passions blend in the heart, making dispassionate judgment impossible. Feldshuh demonstrates that, even if Meir gave more time to the Jewish state than to her son and daughter, she could not be said to have put the interests of Israelis above the interests of her own children; to her, they were one and the same. Scott Schwartz directs. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

GONE MISSING

The newest production by the Civilians is informed by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but it doesn't take on the big losses. Instead, it looks at everyday life—as one character says, "the world is made of little things; what's important is to remember them largely." In a series of short vignettes, six actors play multiple characters, creating a surprising amount of fun and abundant moments of clear-eyed empathy. By focussing on daily dramas—the loss of a ring or a favorite doll—the show creates a universal sense of what it is to lose, and sometimes find. Written by the company and smoothly directed by Steven Cosson. (Zipper's Belt Theatre, 336 W. 37th St. 212-868-4444.)

IRON

Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new drama by Rona Munro, about a woman who resolves to see her mother, who has been in prison for fifteen years. Directed by Anna D. Shapiro. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

A buoyantly macabre musical about a florist who finds a plant from outer space that wins him fame and the love of a dopey blonde named Audrey, "Little Shop" was a hit from the day it opened, in 1982, and eventually played more than two thousand performances Off Broadway. But only now has it made the leap to Broadway—and what a leap! In a stirring debut at the Virginia, Audrey II—the play's bloodthirsty, leafy star—goes airborne, shooting over the heads of the audience, green jaws clacking. Howard Ashman's vivacious, jaded book and Alan Menken's catchy score are as ap-

pealing as ever, and the cast is splendid. Directed by Jerry Zaks. (245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.)

LIVING OUT

Lisa Loomer's stellar new play about mothers and nannies is centered on the relationship between a go-getter entertainment lawyer, Nancy Robin (Kathryn Meisle), and Ana, her El Salvadoran "caregiver" (Nancy is too progressive to use the word "nanny"). Zilah Mendoza gives an excellent, touching performance as Ana, who must hide the fact that she has a young son at home in order to get her job and who uncomplainingly lavishes the maternal love she can't afford to give her own child on Nancy's daughter. With a versatile set by Neil Patel and flawless direction by Jo Bonney. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. Closes Nov. 2.)

THE NIGHT HERON

The female mullet gets an airing in a peculiar new play by Jez Butterworth ("Mojo") that lands a stenorian lady ex-con, Bolla (Mary McCann), in the ramshackle cottage of two down-and-outers in the Cambridge Fens—Wattmore (Chris Bauer), who is suicidally depressed, and Griffin (Clark Gregg), who is erratic and violent. It is a credit to the seven-member American cast that they make this unlikely bunch of Britons seem real, particularly Bauer, who not only speaks but moves like an Englishman who has just about given up. Directed by Neil Pepe. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

OMNIUM GATHERUM

The intention of Theresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros's witty, pugnacious play, which opens to the sound of a low-flying chopper and the sight of a sumptuous Manhattan dinner party, is to punch the lights out of every intellectual pose. Under the confident and precocious direction of Will Frears, "Omnium Gatherum" is full of polemicists, but it is not itself a polemic. It is, more accurately, a provocation—a show of theatrical fireworks to enlighten our darkness. (10/6/03) (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave. 212-239-6200.)

THE RIVALS

In a delightful production at the Pearl, Sheridan's Restoration comedy gets an extra boost not only from tightly laced corsets but from skilled performances by older actors, notably Robert Hock as the imperious Sir Anthony Absolute. Directed by Robert Neff Williams. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

ROUNDING THIRD

Don (Robert Clohessy) and Michael (Matthew Arkin) are the odd couple of Little League baseball coaching. Don, in jeans and sneakers, seeks to win at all costs; Michael, in khakis and wing tips, seeks only to share a "special activity with his son." John Rando's unforced direction lets the play's real concerns emerge subtly: not baseball, but manhood and fatherhood. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

SILVER NITRATE

The Juggernaut Theatre Company presents a new play by Cathy Caplan, set in Weimar Germany, about a group of photographers who are forced out of artistic isolation and into political involvement by changing times. Directed by Gwynn MacDonald. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 123 E. 24th St. 212-868-4444.)

STRICTLY ACADEMIC

A. R. Gurney presents a convoluted comedy of letters, starring Remy Auberjonois, Susan Greenhill, and Keith Reddin. Directed by Paul Benedict. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 212-333-4052.)

TO MY CHAGRIN

Peggy Shaw, the Obie-winning actress and self-described "second-generation, inbred Irish, white, butch grandmother," confronts her complicated relationship with her mixed-race grandson in a new one-woman play at P.S. 122. Directed by Lois Weaver. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288. Closes Oct. 26.)

THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN

The Public Theatre begins its season with a production of a rarely produced Shakespeare play, which the Bard cowrote with John Fletcher. David Harbour stars. Directed by Darko Tresnjak. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA

Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

AVENUE Q

Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP

Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

BOOB! THE MUSICAL

Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-239-6200.

CABARET

Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Nov. 2.)

CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE

SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO

Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA

Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.

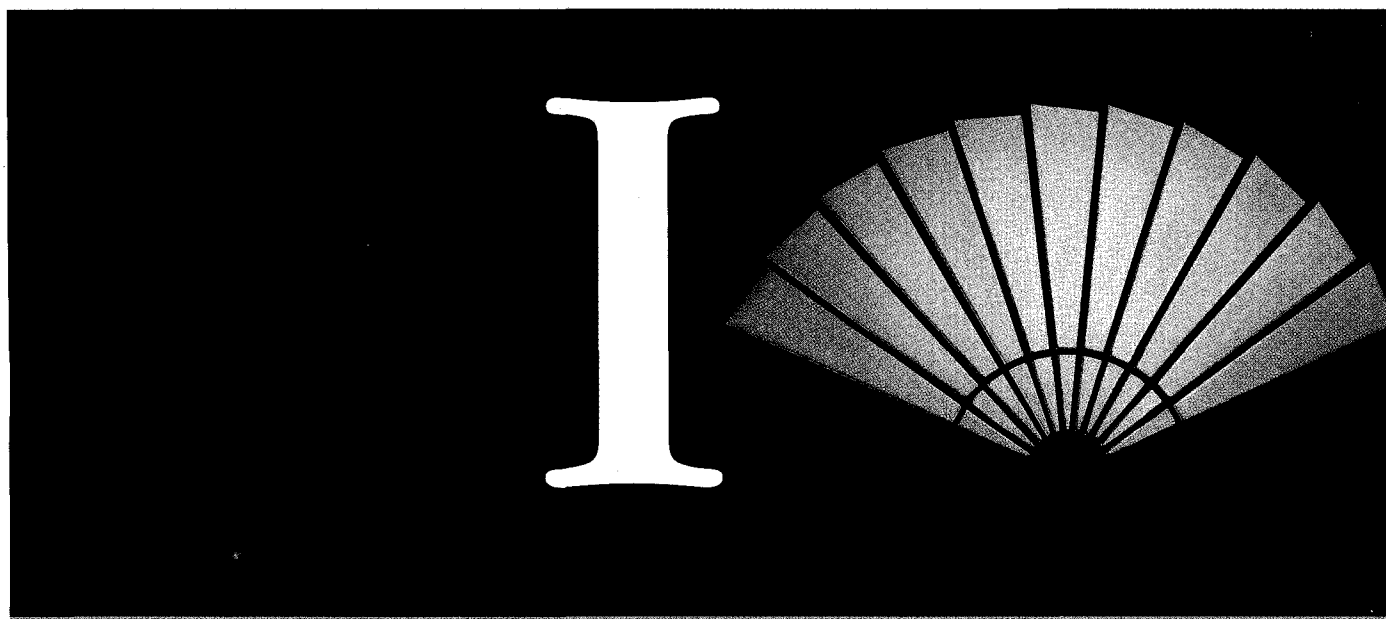
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Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

HAIRSPRAY

Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

THE HARLEQUIN STUDIES

Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.

I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT,**NOW CHANGE**

Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

THE LION KING

New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

MAMMA MIA!

Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MATT & BEN

P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-246-4422.

MOVIN' OUT

Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

NINE

Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS

St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

RENT

Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.

A ROOSTER IN THE HENHOUSE

Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Oct. 25.)

STOMP

Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.

TAKE ME OUT

Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

THE THING ABOUT MEN

Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE

Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.

TRUMBO

Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

URINETOWN

Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE**AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE**

The company presents a sparkling array of new and repertory work in its fall season. The first week features revivals of Agnes de Mille's "Three Virgins and a Devil" (1942), one of A.B.T.'s first ballets; Antony Tudor's torrid "Pillar of Fire" (1942), performed by Gillian Murphy, Marcelo Gomes, and Carlos Molina; and Sir Frederick Ashton's "Symphonic Variations" (1946). There are also pre-

mières: "Le Grand Pas de Deux," performed by Xiomara Reyes and Vladimir Malakhov, and, for the first time at A.B.T., a dance by the choreographer William Forsythe, of Ballet Frankfurt, "work-withinwork," which gives corps members a chance to show their stuff alongside principals, tangling and pairing off in duels or racing past one another in flying quartets. ♦ Oct. 22 at 7 (gala): "Three Virgins and a Devil," "Symphonic Variations," "Diana and Actaeon Pas de Deux," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Le Grand Pas de Deux," and "Theme and Variations." ♦ Oct. 23 at 8: "Diversion of Angels," "Symphonic Variations," "Pillar of Fire," and "Raymonda (Grand Pas Classique)." ♦ Oct. 24 at 8: "Without Words," "work-withinwork," and

"Raymonda (Grand Pas Classique)." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through Nov. 9.)

RONALD K. BROWN / EVIDENCE

Brown, who is known for his distinctive spiritual and athletic choreography, says he always knew that he would make a dance to the music of Nina Simone, but thought the piece would be political. Instead, his tribute to the late singer, "Come Ye," built on a medley of her songs and centered on the title song's declaration that "it's time to learn how to pray," is grounded in the power of faith. While this isn't a new theme for Brown, the pairing of his unique movement idiom and Simone's eclectic lyrics and keening voice works well: her rhythm and blues brings out his boogie; his West African steps resur-



Eddie (the Chief) Clearwater and Los Straitjackets, at Southpaw (see Night Life).

"Within You Without You: A Tribute to George Harrison." ♦ Oct. 25 at 2: "Theme and Variations," "Le Grand Pas de Deux," "Three Virgins and a Devil," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Oct. 25 at 8: "Without Words," "work-withinwork," and "Within You Without You: A Tribute to George Harrison." ♦ Oct. 26 at 2: "Theme and Variations," "Le Grand Pas de Deux," "Three Virgins and a Devil," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Oct. 26 at 7:30: "Diversion of Angels," "Symphonic Variations," "Pillar of Fire," and "Raymonda (Grand Pas Classique)." ♦ Oct. 28 at 7:30: "Diversion of Angels," "Symphonic Variations," "Pillar of Fire," and

rect her roots. Through it all, the company dances with such straight-faced seriousness that summoning the ancestors with a processional or a disco-style finger waggle seems equally appropriate. The season also includes a new solo for Brown ("For You"), "High Life" (2000), and excerpts from last year's rich "Walking Out the Dark." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Oct. 21-24 at 8, Oct. 25 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 26 at 2 and 7:30.)

"SLEEPING BEAUTY AND OTHER STORIES"

In Susan Marshall & Company's spare, minimalist, yet tender update of the tale, dancers attempt to rescue a blond beauty (Kristin Hollinsworth) from bleak urban isolation and from her own lulling

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dream world. The evening's second piece, "Other Stories," made up of short episodes of chance intersections and coincidences, is humorous, and lighter. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Oct. 21-25 at 7:30.)

NIKOLAIS DANCE THEATRE

A rare presentation of works by the late Alwin Nikolais, selected by Nikolais's longtime collaborator, Murray Louis, and performed by Utah's Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, comes to the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Oct. 28 at 8. Through Nov. 2.)

"MIMESIS"

In a Matthew Barney-esque examination of replication and production, Cary Baker, one of the founders of Kick Stand Dance, turns the company's Williamsburg black-box theatre into a series of disorienting display cases for the female form. In one area, a hundred and fifty plastic figurines emerge from fake-grass lawns, gazing out blankly from transparent boxes. The surreal setup continues in the whitened performance space, as six female dancers wearing long skirts, red lipstick, and flexible casts of their own busts glide and tumble along a green path, held aloft by ropes that evoke umbilical cords. The group splits in two, but their curious cyclical activities bring their hermetic world back to order. (Triskelion Arts, 118 N. 11th St., Brooklyn. Entrance on N. 10th St. between Berry and Wythe Sts. Oct. 22-26 at 8.)

"BLACK BURLESQUE (REVISITED)"

In the past seven years, at home and abroad, Reggie Wilson and his post-modern, Brooklyn-based Fist & Heel Performance Group have met with Black Umfolosi (the Zimbabwean a cappella group) and Noble Douglas Dance Company (the classic modern troupe from Trinidad and Tobago), seeking to share and combine their different traditions of expression. "What we've done is to integrate various points from each of our cultures that intersect and seem similar," Wilson said. In his season at Dance Theatre Workshop, Wilson presents the fruit of this cross-fertilization, a hybrid production of dance, song, and percussion, performed by twelve dancers winnowed from all three groups. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 22-25 at 7. Through Nov. 1.)

"DESCENT"

Noémie Lafrance's dizzying, spectral site-specific 2002 dance, performed along several flights of a spiral staircase in the Clocktower building, in Tribeca, returns for five weeks of performances. (108 Leonard St. 212-868-4444. Oct. 23 and Oct. 26 at 7 and 8:30 and Oct. 24-25 at 7, 8:30, and 10. Through Nov. 23.)

DANSPLACE PROJECT

City/Dans presents two premières by Curt Haworth: "Glass Box" and "Amnesia," performed by Haworth, Amanda Loulaki, and others. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Oct. 23-26 at 8:30.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

EMMYLOU HARRIS AND FRIENDS

The American musical icon and country legend hosts a four-day mini-festival at Carnegie Hall featuring a few of her favorite musicians. The first three shows are in the new Zankel Hall, with Kate and Anna McGarrigle (Oct. 21 at 7), Steve Earle (Oct. 21 at 10), Buddy and Julie Miller (Oct. 22 at 7), and Patty Griffin (Oct. 22 at 10). Harris makes her Carnegie Hall debut upstairs in Isaac Stern Auditorium on Oct. 25 at 8. (212-247-7800.)

CMJ MUSIC MARATHON

Though CMJ is no longer officially called the *College Music Journal*, most of the bands here for this annual festival have been nurtured by campus radio stations. The event often resembles freshman orien-

tation, as bleary-eyed undergraduates stare at subway maps en route to a midnight performance by a band they're supposed to have heard of. For the musicians themselves, it's a chance to say hello to old friends, and to try, yet again, to impress the A. & R. folks. And for casual music fans it's an opportunity to get the aural equivalent of a good liberal-arts education. Eager students of all ages should visit www.cmj.com/marathon for more information. See also Webster Hall, and many of this week's other club listings. (Oct. 22-25.)

"AS OF NOW"

Anyone who continues to hang on to the myth that authentic and innovative jazz musicians are bred only



Peggy Shaw in "To My Chagrin," at P.S. 122 (see Theatre).

in the United States has never heard the pianist Martial Solal. An Algerian by birth, Solal, who has lived in Paris for the past half century, is a modern-jazz original with a frightening technical prowess that is matched only by his delightfully abstract imagination; he's joined by two prodigious improvisers who themselves have spent considerable time in Europe, the alto saxophonist Phil Woods and the soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy. The Parisian pianist Hervé Sellin will also appear. (Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Oct. 23 and Oct. 25 at 8.)

MARS VOLTA

The vocalist Cedric Bixler and the guitarist Omar Rodriguez created this band to exorcise the musical and emotional demons they couldn't with their incendiary Texas punk band, At the Drive-In. "De-Loused in the Comatorium," Mars Volta's sprawling debut album, is a frenetic fusion of styles. A testament to the pair's uncompromising vision, it owes as much to the forbidden realms of progressive rock as it does to the band's punk-rock origins. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 212-307-7171. Oct. 24 at 6:45.)

MATCHBOX TWENTY

Hugely successful yet seemingly damned to chronic unhappiness, these reluctant bearers of the mainstream-rock albatross make radio-friendly music that has won legions of fans (and scored the singer Rob Thomas a lucrative spot on Santana's 1999 hit single "Smooth"). (Madison Square Garden. 212-307-7171. Oct. 24 at 7:30.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Oct. 24 at 8: A night of Balkan wedding music with the clarinetist Ivo Papasov and the saxophonist

Yuri Yunakov, veterans of the legendary Bulgarian outfit Trakija, who are playing together for the first time in a dozen years. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) Oct. 25 at 8: Africa meets Latin America, as two seasoned local groups, Los Macondos and Super Uba y Su Conjunto, perform the roots music of Colombia and the Dominican Republic, respectively. (Symphony Space.) (For more information about both shows, call 212-545-7536.)

PAUL WELLER

Thanks to a decade-long solo career, the venerable Modfather reigns in his native England as the king of dadrock. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-307-7171. Oct. 27 at 8. See also Irving Plaza.)

"AUTUMN SAMBA"

Some forty years after their initial release, the pioneering bossa-nova recordings of the tenor saxophonist Stan Getz, which brought the enchanting compositions of Antonio Carlos Jobim up north, retain their intoxicating hold on listeners, be they seasoned jazz aficionados or po-mo novices. Paying tribute to the late collaborators are a host of international bossa lovers, including the acclaimed Brazilian vocalist Gal Costa and the Japanese composer-pianist Ryuichi Sakamoto. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 28 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

ARLENE GROCERY

95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (212-358-1633)—Oct. 25: After stints in the celebrated cult bands Microdisney and the Fatima Mansions, Ireland's Cathal Coughlan has taken a solo turn that is less musically abrasive than his former outfits, but no less outspoken.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 23: Fond of decrying both political injustice and the cliquey quirks of their own community, Pennsylvania's Anti-Flag are purist punk rockers whose allegiance to the old school's ideals and aesthetics borders on fundamentalism. Oct. 24-25: The Hammond-organ-driven retro jazz and funk of Soulive. With Meshell Ndegeocello. Oct. 26: The Wu-Tang Clan veteran RZA. Oct. 27: The urban-contemporary R. & B. diva Mya, as known for her provocative dance steps as for her music, steps up her campaign for dominance in a genre rife with competition. Her third album, "Mo'Nasty," showcases the leggy siren's versatility in its dizzying mix of plangent balladry and sexual assertiveness.

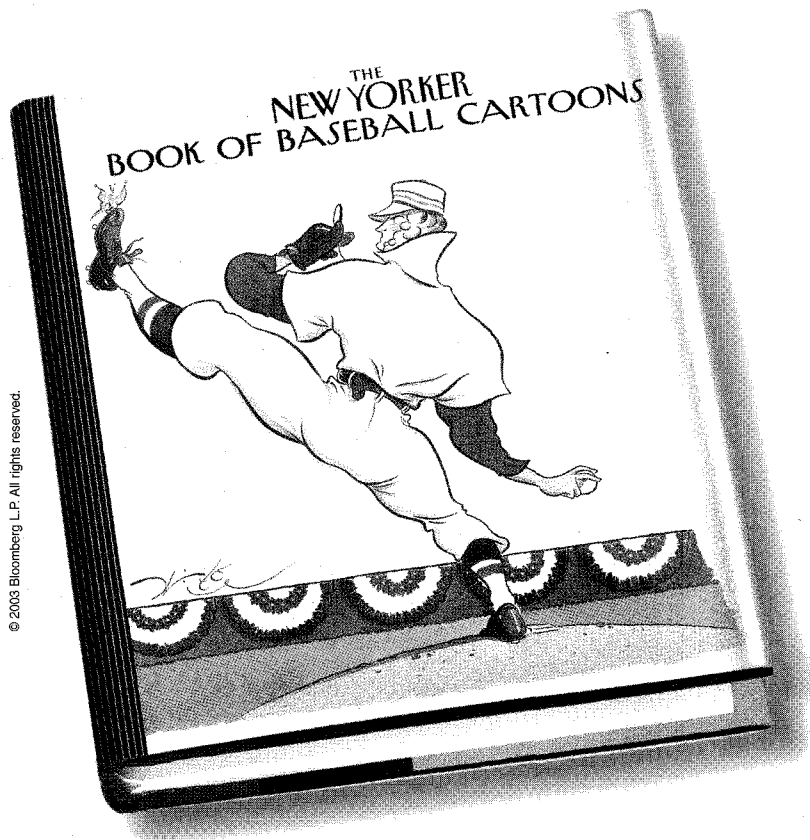
BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Oct. 23: Appearing here for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the English label Rough Trade, British Sea Power share a taste for dramatics with their label ancestor the Smiths. The band's tight, focussed rock contrasts with their baroque, willfully ornamented stage performances, in which flora and fauna play a large role. Oct. 24: Stars, a dreamy electronic pop outfit that occasionally turns eerie, plays a showcase for their label, Arts & Crafts, which has introduced the U.S. to Toronto's nascent music scene, releasing albums such as "Heart" from Stars, and "You Forgot It in People," by the Broken Social Scene, who will also perform. Oct. 26-27: Named after an obscure track by the British absurdist pioneers the Bonzo Dog Band, Death Cab for Cutie plays an ethereal blend of indie pop particularized by shimmering subtlety.

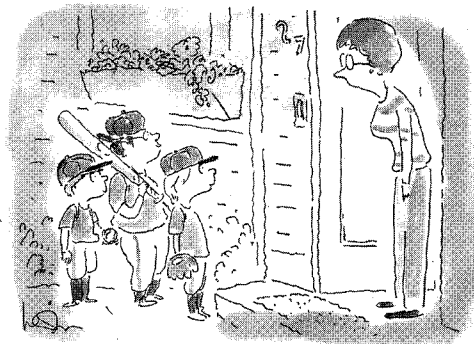
CENTRO-FLY

45 W. 21st St. (212-627-7770)—Oct. 24: The four-year-old Chelsea dance club reopens after a six-week-plus renovation with a new look and a

Major League Laughs!



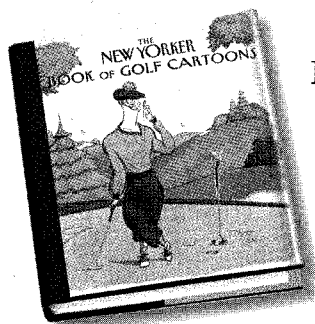
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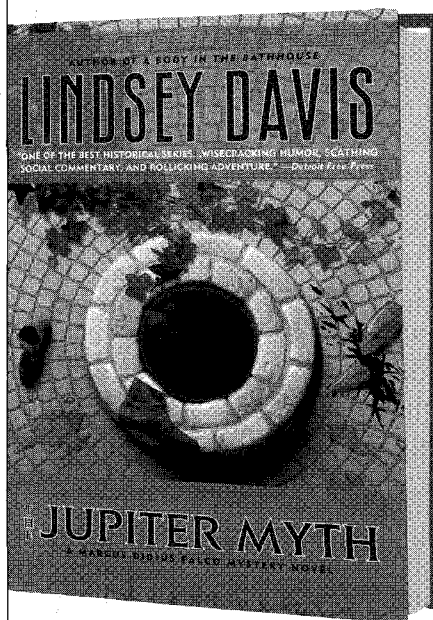
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IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 22: **Death Cab for Cutie** (see the Bowery Ballroom). Oct. 23: Though dressed up in the same shabby-chic duds of many of today's neo-garage bands, the hirsute Australian quartet **Jet** often betray their big rock riffs with countryish ballads that recall the vintage Rolling Stones. Oct. 24: A hard-rocking sextet from Reading, England, the **Cooper Temple Clause** noisily dabble in a mélange of styles, sprucing up driving guitars with horns, harmonies, squelching electronics, and other seemingly incongruous elements. The common thread throughout remains a devotion to high volume. Oct. 28: **Paul Weller** (see Concerts).

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Oct. 27: Following in the estimable footsteps of Abba, the Hives, and, uh, Ace of Base, the **Sounds** are a Swedish band of retrophiles who hearken back to the halcyon days of New Wave. That the Sounds vocalist Maja Ivarsson is a stunning blond bombshell in the tradition of Deborah Harry hardly hurts their mission.

SOUTHPAW

125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Oct. 24: **Los Straitjackets**, the crazy Nashville band known for donning colorful Mexican wrestling masks and blasting audiences with hurricane-force surf-rock instrumentals, play support for **Eddie (the Chief) Clearwater**, a Chicago bluesman with a mean Chuck Berry streak and a fondness for feathered headdresses. Not to be missed. With the **Woggles**. Oct. 25: The beloved Japanese all-girl trio **Shonen Knife** have been cult favorites since the early eighties, when their naive pop struck a chord with the fledgling alternative underground. Twenty years later, the band's celebrated cuteness may seem a bit formulaic and gimmicky, but it's no less endearing.

UNION POOL

484 Union Ave., at Meeker Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-609-0484)—Oct. 25: **Bobby Bare, Jr.**, proves that being the son of country royalty doesn't mean you have to adhere to the strict codes of Nashville. His paean to his forebears, "Dig Down," pays homage to Black Francis and Jimi but makes no mention of Hank or Merle. He appears here in a daytime show as part of **Merle's annual CMJ** barbecue, where the music comes with grilled meat.

WARSAW

261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—Oct. 23: The charismatic Arthur Lee and his band, **Love**. Oct. 24: The tough-as-nails pioneer and rock-and-roll role model **Joan Jett** returns to the stage, with the tireless, party-obsessed **Andrew W.K.** in tow.

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Oct. 22: Configuring a purposely eclectic lineup for their opening-night party, the organizers of this year's CMJ Music Marathon mix disparate elements, like the electronica of VHS or Beta and the sardonic British indie pop of **Black Box Recorder** with the sweaty punk revivalism of the Fever and the jazzy dance music of the New Deal. The biggest draws of the bill, however, come in the unlikely matching of the psychedelic indie rock of Kentucky's **My Morning Jacket** with the long-awaited return of the post-punk icons **Killing Joke**. Where **My Morning Jacket** will conjure an alt-country atmosphere of dreamy Beach Boysian utopia, count on the Joke to supply a bug-eyed invocation of unfettered apocalypse. Oct. 25: **Echo & The Bunnymen** may no longer resemble the insouciantly louche young bohemians who adorn their early album covers, but their inimitable blend of atmospheric post-punk still exudes effortless cool.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through Oct. 26: The spirit of unadulterated bebop lives on in the Dizzy Gillespie Alumni All-Stars ensemble, which brings together illustrious veterans from various Gillespie bands and younger acolytes, including the saxophonists

TABLES FOR TWO



'CESCA

164 W. 75th St. (212-787-6300)—Devotees of chef Tom Valenti's swaggering Upper West Side restaurant, Owest, with its bold black-and-red décor and its emphasis on slow-cooked tough-guy food, are packing his very beige new trattoria expecting similar excitement. But if Owest was the spirited devil leering from one of Valenti's shoulders, so far 'Cesca is the polite angel. It's so blandly tasteful that looking around the room is like flipping through a Pottery Barn catalogue.

But the plush brown banquettes are large enough that the noise in the busy room almost disappears when you're inside them. That's the principle behind the food as well: comfort over drama. There are a few sharp details among the antipasti: fava beans in the garlic soup, celery leaves and radish slivers on the vitello tonnato, and little cubes of fig tucked among the prosciutto and Pecorino. There's nothing complicating entrées like calf's liver wrapped in pancetta and tripe with red-wine sauce—they're straightforward to the point of bluntness. But it's the menu's midsection that delivers the primitive satisfactions; dishes like the gnocchi with duck and plenty of garlic or the thick filet of skate on a block of risotto-like rice melt into a nostalgic mush of textures and flavors. And dessert here is no afterthought—the crowd eyeballs a passing panna cotta or a tiramisù like a theatre audience waiting for the old standards. The mascarpone cheesecake is the most Off Broadway choice, with its unexpectedly sophisticated bitter-orange-and-fennel brittle.

For some real fun, order the *amaro* tasting—an array of *digestivi* will arrive in their ornate bottles, and the sommelier will not only point out the strong flavors of pine or beet but will correct any errors in judgment. "If you had the three you picked, you'd never drink an *amaro* again," he says as he drops off a few less medicinal extras, like the lighter Amaro Montenegro and the *amaro*-grappa hybrid Quintessentia Amaro Nonino. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées \$16-\$28.)

—Owen Phillips

James Moody and Jackie McLean and the trumpeters Jon Faddis, Roy Hargrove, and Clark Terry.

CARLYE HOTEL

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlye, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wrap-around murals, and Bobby Short.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through Oct. 25: If country rather than cabaret comes to mind at the mention of Crystal Gayle, credit her 1977 hit, "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue," which made a bit more of a splash than, say, her 1999 Hoagy Carmichael tribute album. Gayle's mixed-genre mélange, however, can only bring some needed sass to the supper-club scene.

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Oct. 26: Every musical genre can lay claim to a golden age; jazz funk, much maligned but obviously durable, shone brightest in the late sixties and early seventies. Two characteristic players of the time, the pianist Les McCann and the noted session guitarist Cornell Dupree, team up with the neo-funkster saxophonist Bill Evans in the aptly named group Soul Survivors. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator Les Paul.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 23-26: The Elaine Elias trio. The Brazilian-born pianist and vocalist Elias has a light-handed ease with tropical rhythms and phrasing, as well as with mainstream jazz. Dining.

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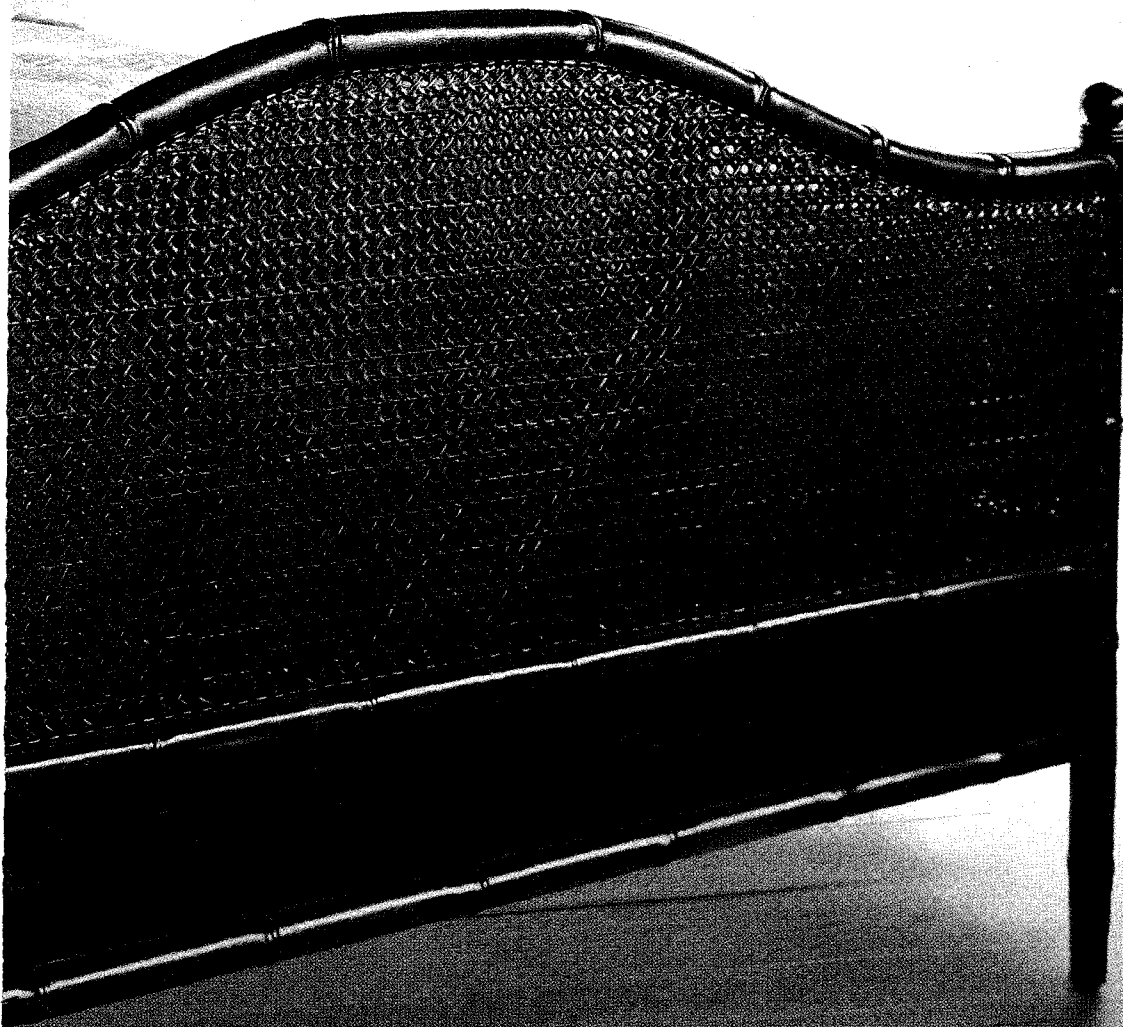
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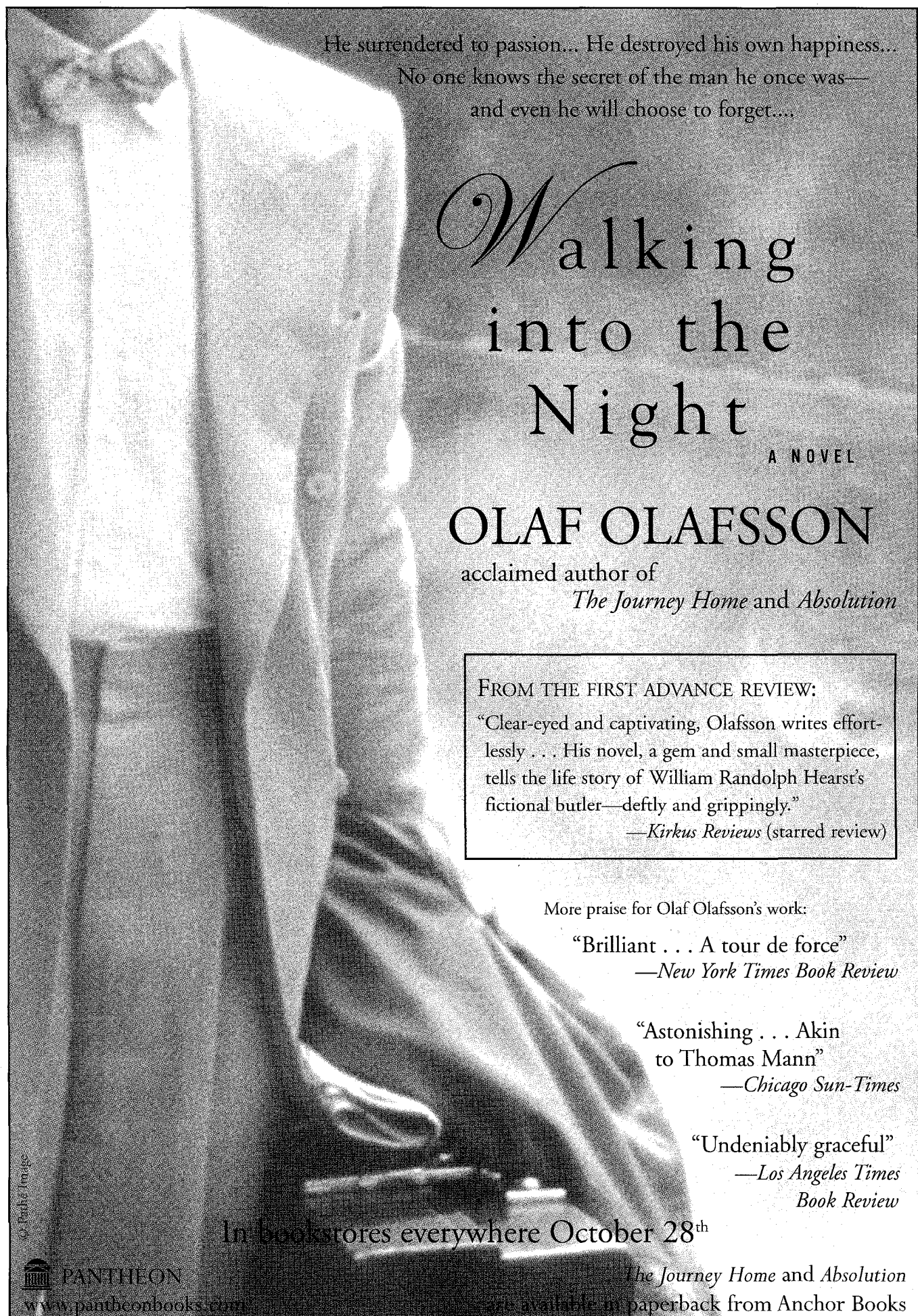
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SMOKE

2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (212-864-6662)—Oct. 24-25: The **John Hicks** trio. More is more for the veteran pianist, but his passionate whiplash keyboard excursions are as bracing now as they were when he was first gaining attention with Art Blakey and others, back in the sixties.

SWEET RHYTHM

88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Oct. 22: Having brightened the bands of such diverse leaders as Phil Woods and Eddie Palmieri, the fluent trumpeter **Brian Lynch** steps out on his own with his Latin-influenced band, *Spheres of Influence*. Oct. 24-25: The Chilean expat **Claudia Acuña** is one of a growing number of Latin-American singers making their mark on the local jazz scene lately.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Oct. 26: The indefatigable trumpeter **Dave Douglas's** new ensemble, *Word*, brings together an unlikely crew, including the avant-garde trombonist **Roswell Rudd**, the old-school vocalist **Andy Bey**, and the young-lion saxophonist **Myron Walden**. The *Vanguard Jazz Orchestra* holds sway on Mondays.

artists who remained loyal to the Ming dynasty after it was overthrown by the Manchus, in 1644. Their subject was the landscape around the dynasty's symbolic capital, Nanjing. Craggy cliffs dotted with pine trees dominate, and the occasional figure is provided more for perspective than as subject matter. One exception is a dazzling hand scroll by Shitao, a panoramic epic depicting sixteen Buddhist saints dwelling in the mountains with various auspicious beasts, including a tiger and a dragon. Another work by Shitao, this one a hanging scroll, shows a mountain misted in drops of splattered ink, a technique that the artist referred to elsewhere as the "ten thousand ugly ink dots," beating Pollock by a few hundred years. Through Jan. 25. ♦ "The Responsive Eye" surveys Native American art from 3000 B.C. forward; the earliest museum endorsements came somewhere in the early nineteen-hundreds, when items began appearing in natural-history and anthropology displays. By the middle of the twentieth century, pieces began making their way into art museums, and collectors like Ralph T. Coe (who was also a curator) took serious interest. Coe amassed the tremendous inventory here, promised to the museum. A surprising amount



"Ready for Ballet Rehearsal, Stamford, Connecticut," from 1959, by Anne Zane Shanks, at the New-York Historical Society (see Photography).

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—A show of the works of Domenikos Theotokopoulos—El Greco. Through Jan. 11. ♦ When the French diorama artist Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre invented a way to make one-of-a-kind photographs on silver-plated copper, the rage for daguerreotypes became so intense that five and a half tons of silver were used by Parisian platemakers in a single year. (The mania ended with the invention of photographic paper, in the mid-eighteen-fifties.) "The Dawn of Photography: French Daguerreotypes, 1839-1855," an exhaustive and, at times, exhausting show, features a hundred and seventy-five works, from still-lives to street scenes to portraits of well-known figures like Eugène Delacroix (looking maniacal) and Victor Hugo (looking crabby). Near the end of the show, a selection of female nudes is followed by a dog, a bull, a horse, and a prosthetic limb, as if to say that all subjects are equal before the camera's neutral gaze. Each one is captured in preternaturally crisp detail, as if, according to one early daguerreotypist, "the mirror had memory." Through Jan. 4. ♦ "Dreams of Yellow Mountain" is an extensive show of landscape paintings by Chinese

of it was made for the tourist trade, including a card case, a doll-house chair, and a pair of very pointy little moccasins. Among the pieces that are free of this sort of influence are a pair of headdress frontlets from the Pacific Northwest and several carved masks, including an arrestingly long-beaked ceremonial example whose large, caricatured features look as though they could have had some influence on the colonizers—their cartoonists in particular. Through Dec. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)

33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—Liam Gillick's wall painted with intertwining bands of ochre, brown, and orange transforms the museum's entrance into a cross between a Scandinavian design center and a corporate lobby. The image suggests a magnified diagram of fibre-optic cable, which is fitting, since the project was originally conceived for a Norwegian telecommunications company. Near the ticket counter, a painted aluminum cube is suspended from the ceiling, lined with text from B. F. Skinner's "Walden Two." If the connection between the two works seems tangential, that's the point: distraction and diversion are central to Gillick's project, which sneaks his complex and subversive theories of post-utopian social space (you can find his articulate explanation of this in a museum brochure) into objects that

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Keith Sonnier's "Live Video," an installation from 1970, re-created at Ace.

have the polish and appeal of mass-produced design. Through Dec. 1. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—A retrospective of the works of the onetime sign painter James Rosenquist includes major works from the fifties to the present. Through Jan. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—The Bay Area painter Jay De Feo (1929-89) is best known for her magnum opus, "The Rose." It took her eight years (1958-66) to complete, and by the time it was extricated from her studio it weighed more than a ton. (The studio floor had grown so encrusted with paint that the artist Bruce Conner, who filmed the painting's removal, described walking on it as feeling "like walking on the back of a whale.") "The Rose," with its radiant mass of silvery-white impasto, lies literally at the center of this small but potent show, "Beside the Rose: Selected Works by Jay De Feo." But the show opens with a more typical gesture: a seven-foot-long drawing of a ghostly pair of eyes. Puzzling vertical lines simultaneously fracture the image and heighten its oracular intensity—a struggle between obfuscation and revelation that's at the heart of De Feo's elusive art. Through Feb. 29. ♦ "Ellsworth Kelly: Red Green Blue." Through Nov. 2. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

in place. The mechanism is disarmingly simple—the white paper creature is attached by a string to a small motor—and the effect charms. Alas, Kaino didn't know when to stop. The string continues through a hole in the wall, connecting to a further installation as large and clunky as the crane is delicate. For reasons that remain unclear, the assemblage involves giant dentures, an inflatable swimming pool, water, AstroTurf, and a stuffed jackalope (that is, a rabbit sporting antelope horns). Through Nov. 1. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

PIERO MANZONI

The Italian artist, who died in 1963, at the age of twenty-nine, was fond of bad-boy antics like canning his own excrement (sold for the price of its weight in gold). But, as this show demonstrates, he also possessed a stunning formal grace. The white paintings on view—Manzoni called them "achromes"—may be constructed from irreverent materials (fake fur, cotton puffs, polystyrene), but they could go head to head with anything by Malevich or Ryman. Through Nov. 1. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

Short List

JANET MALCOLM

Bookstein, 50 E. 78th St. 212-439-9605. Through Nov. 26.

GALLERIES-CHelsea

CARLOS AMORALES

An installation by a young Mexican artist inaugurates the Chelsea branch of the Parisian gallery Yvon Lambert. Red paint drips on the walls as black silhouettes of birds dangle in space (they're suspended from mobiles, like Calder's). The apocalyptic tone continues in a slide show of related drawings: planes fly through blood-splattered skies and birds have human skulls. Amoraless seems to have been striving for an effect somewhere between "Helter Skelter" ZOHAR LAZAR

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

GLENN KAINO

Behind a pocket magnifying glass set on a plinth, before a postcard backdrop of an industrial alleyway, a tiny origami crane flaps its wings and seems to fly

and "The Birds," but his slick and stylized intimations of disaster exude as much menace as a Halloween ad campaign for Target. Through Oct. 25. (564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611.)

JOANNE GREENBAUM

If you visited the famously picturesque Lake Como, you might not see it as an agglomeration of flat disks, bars, and drips in Hi-Liter colors, but Greenbaum did. Her new paintings, inspired by a trip to Italy, offer crooked geometries in glaring orange and acid green and a combination of translucency and chunkiness that is undeniably pleasant to look at. But in spite of the tangy hues and lighter-than-air angularity the compositions are too slight; their cloudlike pleasures waft past as lightly as they came. Through Nov. 1. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

FRANK MOORE

The show opens with a sly one-two punch, provided by a painting from 1989. Two roses bloom against a wasteland of tree stumps, memorializing the AIDS diagnoses of Moore and his partner that year while warning of the environmental hazard of clear-cutting. But the goofy glass eyeballs affixed to the flowers offset the painting's mournful impact. Moore died last year, at the age of forty-eight; he is survived by his irresistible knack for interlacing the humorous and the cautionary, like the genetically engineered corn cob that has a keyboard in place of kernels. Through Oct. 25. (Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337.)

TOBIAS PUTRIH

For his first solo show in this country, the Slovenian Putrih nods to modernist icons like Frederick Keisler's "Endless House," Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes, and El Lissitzky's architectural conceit of "cloud ironing," with sculptures made from egg crates, twist ties, postcards, and balloons. Intellectual density overpowers the fragile materials, however, and the best piece is the least historically freighted: a corrugated-cardboard model of sandstonelike rock walls split by two smooth white plaster expanses, as if giant movie screens were mounted in the desert. Through Nov. 1. (Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999.)

Short List

MATTHEW BLISS

Zieher Smith, 531 W. 25th St. 212-229-1088.
Through Nov. 2.

JASON RHOADES

Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.
Through Oct. 25.

RICHARD SERRA

Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.
Through Oct. 25.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

ALEX KATZ

The word "cartoon" might conjure images of comic books in the minds of most people, but it also refers to a traditional technique used to prepare large-scale paintings: outlines of figures in drawings are perforated with tiny holes and then dusted with dry pigment, leaving traces on the surface below. In this revelatory show of Katz's cartoons, an artist famous for the decisive cool of his portraits gives viewers a glimpse of the fluctuation that precedes them. There's a spontaneous intimacy to the brown-paper drawings (notably Katz's self-portrait with his wife, Ada), as sketch overlays sketch until a definitive swipe of burnt sienna installs the final image. Through Nov. 15. (Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

BJORN MELHUS

The image in the video is simple: a side-by-side projection shows a rather hectoringly handsome man, like a flamboyant TV newscaster; he wears an orange necktie matched to his ominous halo, and for a long moment he does nothing but stare penetratingly. Then the sound comes up, and Melhus's eerie, moving piece "Weeping" takes effect. The artist, who plays the man, mouths portentous, fragmented phrases spliced from the televangelical Trinity Broadcasting Network, such as "I want you to know

What do you
take for granted?



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that we have seen," and "Blow the trumpets!" As a disjunctive sermon on power and apocalypse, the piece is more political than religious, both hypnotic and terrifying. Through Oct. 25. (Satellite, 94 Prince St. 718-599-5352.)

KEITH SONNIER

When Sonnier began the work collected here, in the sixties, he was at once of his era (when will black light come back?) and years ahead of it (when will video go away?). None of his experiments have met with greater success (and more imitators) than "Live Video," and viewers can appear before the same camera that projected (in positive- and negative-image versions simultaneously) the work's first viewers, at Ace Los Angeles in 1970. Through Dec. 31. (Ace, 275 Hudson St. 212-255-5599.)

Short List

MICHEL AUDER

Participant, 95 Rivington St. 917-488-0185. Through Oct. 26.

PHOTOGRAPHY

ROY DE CARAVA

For his first gallery appearance in more than a decade, the master black-and-white photographer Roy DeCarava offers up a set of recent images that are more personal than the street scenes for which he is best known. The pleasure is not so much in what is seen but in how it is shown. DeCarava's prints are some of the most thoughtful studies of darkness made with a camera, and at times they look more like renderings in charcoal than like photographs. It's irrelevant whether the image is of a sparrow, a pianist reaching for a key, or an empty hotel hallway; shadow and darkness are the real protagonists. Through Oct. 25. (Meyerowitz, 120 Eleventh Ave. 212-414-2770.)

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

The gardens at Claude Monet's home in Giverny need no description, and one would think that they need not be another artist's muse. That said, Lichtenstein's new work, entitled "Landmark," is neither derivative nor ironic. Unlike earlier camera-carrying visitors (most notably Stephen Shore, and many people from Japan), she photographs the garden—and its double, in southern Japan—at dusk and dawn, and often takes advantage of flash and ambient light. The act of returning light to this Impressionist heartland is a fine idea, and unusually successful. Through Nov. 8. (Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

SALLY MANN

"Last Measure," a series from Mann's five-part meditation on mortality, contains seventeen large-scale black-and-white prints of Civil War battlefields. Made with archaic processes and deliberately flawed, the images are scarred, emotional, and dark. Their murkiness demands attention, which is rewarded with landscapes that shift from personal to historical and back. Some seem like Mann's own versions of the Civil War photographs of Timothy O'Sullivan or Alexander Gardner, minus the corpses. Others are more evocative, or more baffling, their horizons askew, their shadows too deep. The most intriguing verge on the abstract—a hillock at Antietam that takes up most of the frame, a lone tree at Manassas defining a dip in the land. A sense of these places' bloody history is never far from the surface. Through Nov. 15. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070.)

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO

These large-scale, blurred black-and-white photographs of iconic buildings are so incomparably

beautiful and tactile that looking almost isn't enough; one yearns to reach out and touch them. The pictures are reductive, but in the best possible way; the structures are distinct enough to be recognizable, but they are stripped of their usual accoutrements (sunlight, color, people), and we're invited to see them anew. The experience is startling and intoxicatingly disorienting. The buildings themselves appear inscrutable and surprisingly organic, as complex and unfathomable as any human being. Who knew, for example, that the Guggenheim Bilbao, without its hard titanium gleam, could be revealed as a sinuous crustacean's carapace, its bulk both menacing and awkward? Sugimoto is a master of light and shadows, and these photographs—rendered in soft shades of silver and gray—are simply wondrous. Through Nov. 1. (Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018.)

Short List

BRIAN FINKE

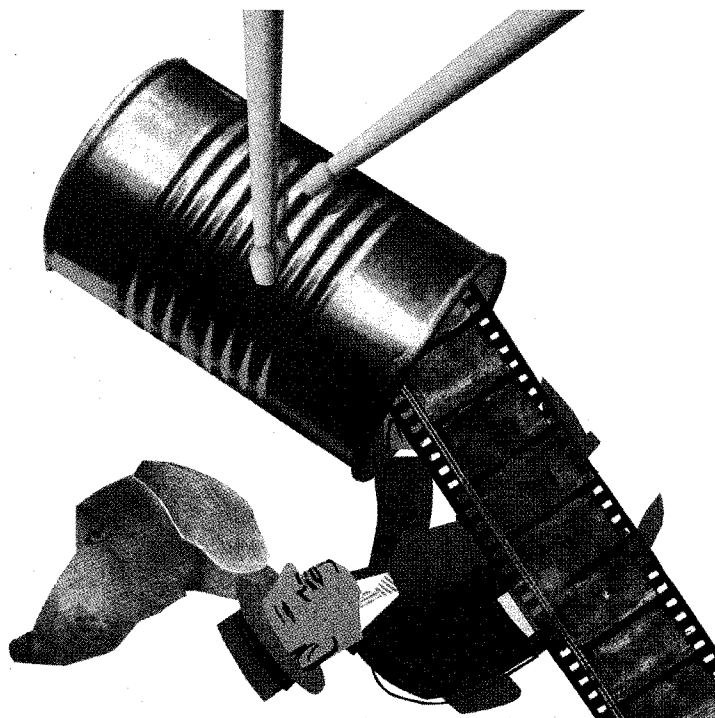
ClampArt, 531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020. Through Nov. 1.

ANNE ZANE SHANKS

New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St. 212-873-3400. Through Jan. 11.

STEPHEN SHORE

303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Oct. 25.



The filmmaker Bill Morrison, the photographer William Wegman, and the cartoonist Ben Katchor provide visuals for "The New Yorkers," Bang on a Can's collaborative concert at BAM this week.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEY'S

Oct. 22 at 10:15 A.M. and 2 and Oct. 23 at 10:15 A.M.: The mega-auction of the American designer Bill Blass's eclectic collection of furniture, art work, and knick-knacks continues; the lots include a third-century Hellenistic terra-cotta figure of a woman, a pen-and-ink drawing by David Hockney entitled "In Bed," several large eighteenth-century French maps, and an assortment of furnishings from Blass's Connecticut farmhouse. ♦ Oct. 24 at 10:15 A.M.: French furniture. ♦ Oct. 28 at 10:15 A.M.: The fulsome charms of the academic style are a special theme of a sale of nineteenth-century European art, including works by Ingres and Bou-

guereau, three bucolic scenes by Jules Breton, and a fanciful portrait by Edward Burne-Jones of the seventeenth-century noblewoman Sidonia Von Bork, who was accused of being a witch and burned at the stake. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S

Oct. 22 at 10 A.M.: The legendary Brazilian socialite Nelson Grimaldi Seabra, whose private collection is up for sale, saw the world from his living room—here are Sicilian gilt-bronze mirrors, Chinese lacquer vases, and walnut armchairs from Britain. ♦ Oct. 22 at 2 and Oct. 23 at 10 A.M. and 2: An eighteenth-century armoire made of ebony, brass, tortoiseshell, horn, and pewter celebrating the Sun King is the centerpiece of a sale of eighteenth-century European furniture, works of art, tapestries, carpets, and ceramics. ♦ Oct. 24 at 10 A.M. and 2: A sale of wine is highlighted by early vintages from Max Schubert's Grange vineyard, which transformed the Australian wine industry into a world-class competitor in the nineteen-fifties. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

"La Bohème," with Hei-Kyung Hong, Zvetelina Vasileva, Roberto Aronica, and Richard Zeller; Daniel Oren conducts. (Oct. 22, Oct. 25, and Oct. 28 at 8.) ♦

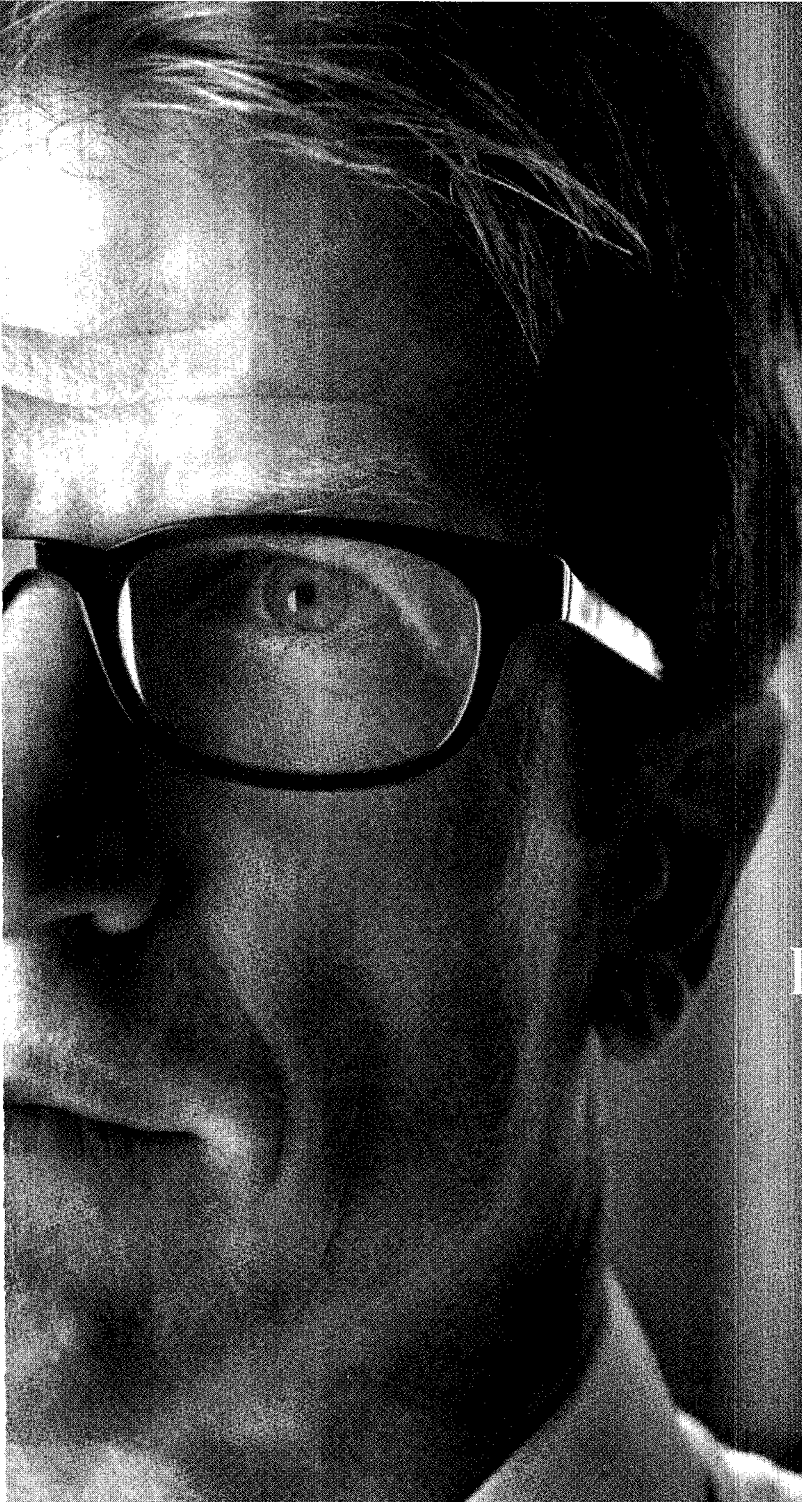
John Dexter's singing-dancing triple bill "Stravinsky" (comprising "Le Sacre du Printemps," "Le Rossignol," and "Oedipus Rex"), complete with its David Hockney designs, returns with splendid performances by the singers Stephanie Blythe, Olga Trifonova, Barry Banks, Robert Gambill, Evgenij Nikitin, and Eric Halfvarson, the dancers Julie Kent and Damian Woetzel, and the actor Philip Bosco; Paul Nadler. (Oct. 23 at 8.) ♦ "Il Barbiere di Siviglia," with Susanne Mentzer, Antonino Siragusa, Russell Braun, and John Del Carlo; Bruno Campanella. (Oct. 24 and Oct. 27 at 8.) ♦ "La Traviata," with Renée Fleming, Rolando Villazon, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; Nadler. (Oct. 25 at 1:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

"The Mikado," featuring Anna Christy, Myrna Paris, Keith Jameson, Richard Suart, and Jan Opalach (in the title role); Gerald Steichen conducts. (Oct. 22 at 7:30 and Oct. 24 at 8.) ♦ John Steinbeck's disenfranchised characters have little to show for themselves besides their basic instincts—not unlike the veteran composer Carlisle Floyd, who in "Of Mice and Men" (one of his successes) displays just enough stagecraft to transform the sorrows of Lennie and George into nourishing operatic fare. Anthony Dean Griffey's clarion tenor and fierce dramatic

commitment give the fractured twists of Lennie's softened mind an almost frightening verisimilitude, while Rod Nelman's firm baritone makes George's failed efforts to control his wayward friend all the more noble; the soprano Nancy Allen Lundy, as the ranch boss Curley's all too tempting wife, is a four-alarm fire poured into a svelte cotton dress. Willie Anthony Waters, the conductor, keeps things cool in the orchestra pit. (Oct. 23 at 7:30 and Oct. 26 at 1:30.) ♦ "Carmen," with Hadar Halevy, Angela Fout, Michael Hendrick, and Kelly Anderson; Steven White conducts. (Oct. 25 at 1:30.) ♦ "The Magic Flute" (sung in English), featuring Jennifer Aylmer, Amanda Pabayan, Tonna Miller, John McVeigh, Dean Anthony, Philip Cutlip, Kelly Anderson, and Gustav Andreassen; Steven Mosteller. (Oct. 25 at 8.) ♦ The soprano Lori Phillips leads the cast of "Turandot,"

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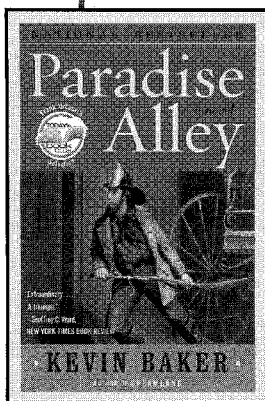
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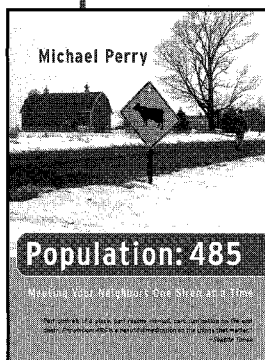
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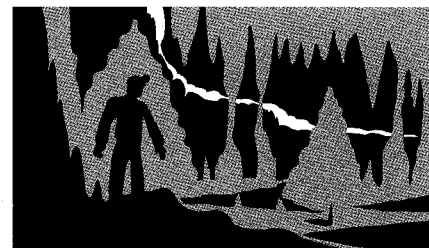
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BOOK CURRENTS

Space Invaders

"It's a torture chamber, I think, a too-small casket tilted foot-up and you're the one inside," Barbara Hurd writes in **ENTERING THE STONE** (Houghton Mifflin). Hurd, a caver for the past ten years, describes the difficulty of crawling through narrow subterranean passage-



ways, called "flatteners" or "squeezes." While tourists visit "show caves" like Howe Caverns in upstate New York, Hurd seeks out the more adventurous "wild" caves, and finds herself "trying to memorize escape" from them. In a marble cave in Oregon, she stops to press her hand into a wall of moonmilk, a calcite deposit with a cream-cheese consistency. But cavers are careful to leave the underground environment much as they found it. Despite collapsed rocks, fossilized bones, and the occasional piece of litter, wild caves may be among the cleanest places on earth.

Caves are marvels not only of space but of time; they remind us of the sublime slowness of the geologic clock. In **CHAUVET CAVE** (Utah), the editor Jean Clottes collects the writings of a team of scientists who are decoding this celebrated system of caverns, discovered in 1994 in southern France. There are photographs of Chauvet's sweeping limestone landscapes and its etchings of rhinoceroses and lions emerging from rocky lairs. The ancient-art specialist David Lewis-Williams devotes **THE MIND IN THE CAVE** (Thames & Hudson) to the connection between such Paleolithic paintings and the evolution of early people. He describes the shock of descending deep underground and finding art work thirty-five thousand years old: "Muddled and exhausted, the explorer will be gazing at the limitless *terra incognita* of the human mind."

—Lauren Porcaro

RICHARD MCGUIRE

also featuring Oksana Kroyvtska, Philip Webb (as Calaf), and Seth Malkin; George Manahan. (Oct. 28 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-870-5570.)

AMATO OPERA: "IL TROVATORE"

Anthony Amato directs and conducts Verdi's melodrama, performed in the company's legendary matchbox theatre on the Lower East Side. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Oct. 25 at 7:30 and Oct. 26 at 2:30. Through Nov. 23.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Lorin Maazel continues his three-week festival of Beethoven's symphonies and piano concertos. The generous sampling of keyboard talent begins with the Viennese veteran Rudolf Buchbinder, who offers the Piano Concerto No. 2 on a program that also features the First and Second Symphonies. (Oct. 23 at 7:30.) ♦ Christian Zacharias is the soloist for a more muscular program of the Piano Concerto No. 1, the "Egmont" Overture, and the Symphony No. 3 ("Eroica"). (Oct. 24-25 at 8.) ♦ Gianluca Cascioli makes his Philharmonic debut in the Piano Concerto No. 3; Maazel also conducts the Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5. (Oct. 28 and Oct. 30 at 7:30.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Bernard Haitink leads the orchestra in a program that explores the breadth and depth of *Wagnerism* in music by Franck (the Symphonic Variations, with the pianist Emanuel Ax), Debussy ("La Mer"), and the man himself (excerpts from "Parsifal" and "Tristan und Isolde"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 22 at 8.)

ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE ROMANDE

The Geneva ensemble, made famous in mid-century by its recordings with Ernest Ansermet, continues to thrive under its present music director, Pinchas Steinberg, who leads them in a program of Franck, Saint-Saëns (the sparkling Piano Concerto No. 2, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet), and Mussorgsky-Ravel ("Pictures at an Exhibition") at Avery Fisher Hall. (212-721-6500. Oct. 22 at 8.)

NED ROREM'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

Rorem's ninth decade begins, appropriately, in a week full of the French music he so ardently adores. For a complete listing of events, see www.nedrorem.com. Oct. 24 at 8: The New York Festival of Song presents an encore performance of "Evidence of Things Not Seen," the evening-long magnum opus (set to poetry by Auden, Whitman, Paul Monette, and many others) that it premiered in 1998. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799.) ♦ Oct. 27 at 8: The Magic Circle Opera Repertory Ensemble presents the splashiest event of the week, a gala program of music from across the composer's career, including the melting "Four Madrigals" (based on Sappho texts), the tart and manic "Four Dialogues" (after Frank O'Hara), and a concert version of Rorem's one-act opera "A Childhood Miracle." Delores Ziegler, Marc Kudisch, and the Stan Tucker Vocal Ensemble perform; Edward Albee and Schuyler Chapin will offer spoken tributes. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.) ♦ Oct. 28 at 7:30: Rorem himself accompanies the St. Thomas Choir in a program of his sacred works. (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 212-664-9360.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA

Emanuel Ax, whose curiosity about the music and influence of Debussy is guiding a series of Carnegie Hall events this season, joins the orchestra in a program featuring Debussy's "Ibéria" along with Falla's "Nights in the Gardens of Spain"; Charles Dutoit conducts. (212-247-7800. Oct. 26 at 2.)

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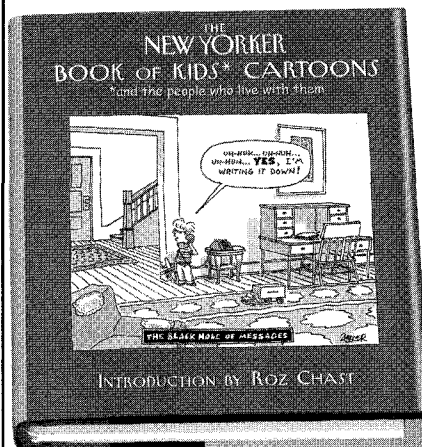


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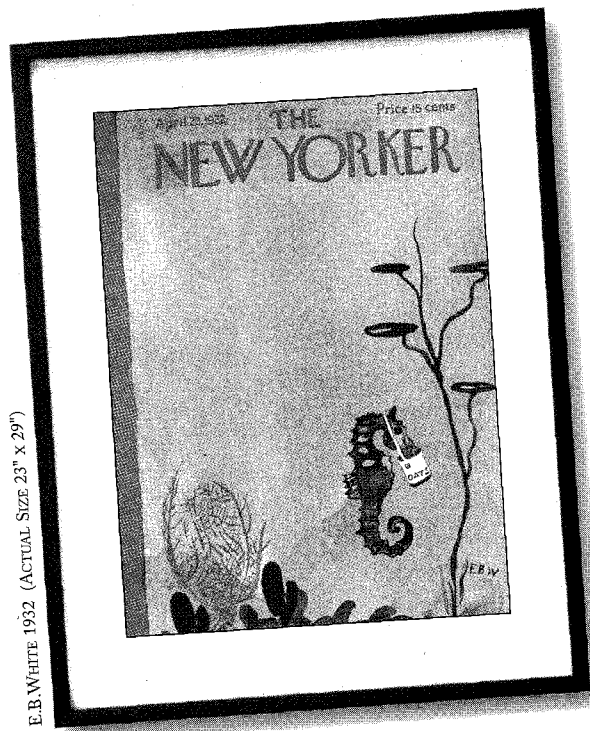
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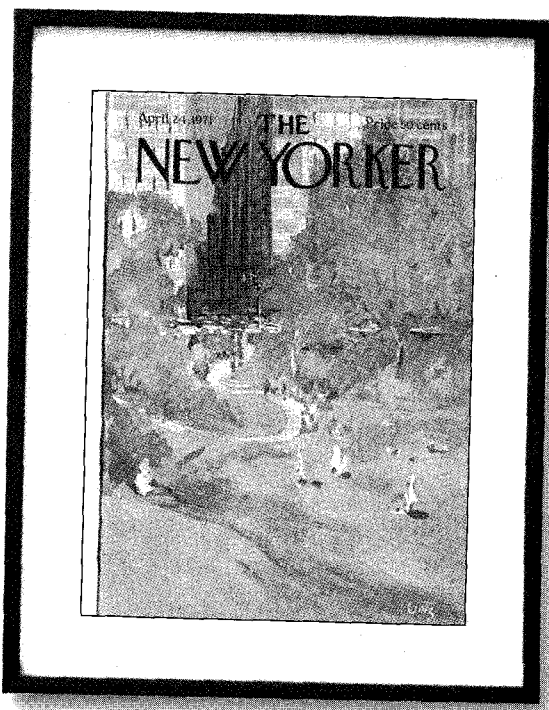
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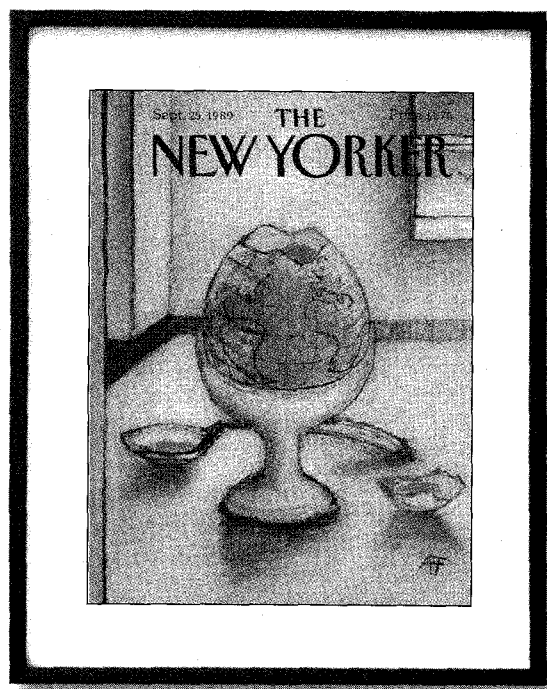
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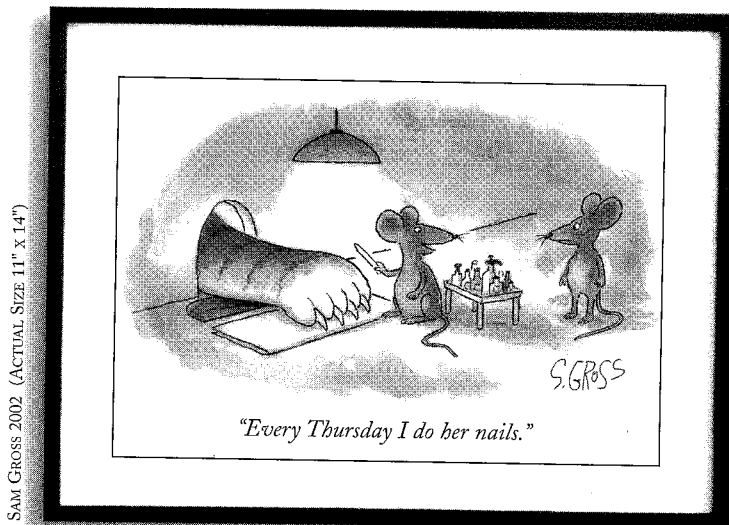
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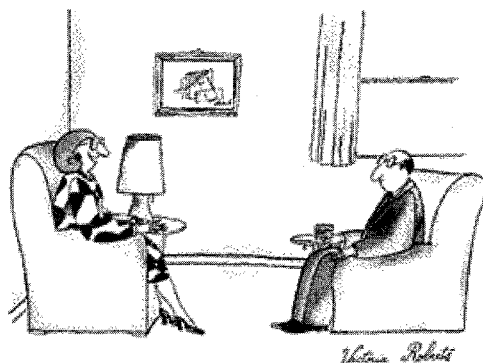
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literary contributions by such luminaries as William Wegman, Lou Reed, and Ben Katchor to create a crucible of the New York experience, whimsical and disturbing by turns. The Bang on a Can All-Stars, the Ethel string quartet, the Michael Gordon Band, and the avant-cabaret divo Theo Bleckmann perform it; the director Barry Edelstein will stitch its pieces into the semblance of a whole. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 22 and Oct. 24-25 at 7:30.)

LARS VOGT

The underrated young German pianist—not a prodigy, not a showoff, and an artist as alive to structure as he is to song—establishes his classical credentials with a recital of Beethoven, Brahms, and Schubert (the Sonata in C Minor, D. 958). (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 23 at 7:30.)

EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK

Frederick Renz's ensemble opens its thirtieth season with a concert of music for voices and ancient instruments by Machaut and Landini. (St. James Chapel, Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 212-280-0330. Oct. 23 at 8 and Oct. 26 at 3.)

"WHEN MORTY MET JOHN . . ."

Carnegie Hall's three-year celebration of the joyfully creative friendship of Morton Feldman and John Cage concludes. Oct. 25 at 3 and 6 and Oct. 26 at 7:30: The pianist Margaret Leng Tan, the Flux Quartet, and the avant-garde vocalist Joan La Barbara (with many friends) offer concerts of Cage ("Sonatas and Interludes"), Feldman, and Cage, respectively. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.) ♦ Oct. 26 at 2:30: Marilyn Nonken performs Feldman's monumental "Triadic Memories" for piano solo. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799.) ♦ Oct. 26 at 5:15: The impresario George Steel, who seems to wear more hats than anyone else in town, performs a free concert of Cage's complete music for carillon, which can be heard from outside St. Thomas Church. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. No tickets required.)

GUARNERI STRING QUARTET

A season-long traversal of the Beethoven quartets begins with a concert including the Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 127. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 25 at 8.)

TOKYO STRING QUARTET

Schubert's music may be as Viennese as Sacher Torte, but, like so many inhabitants of that reluctantly cosmopolitan burg, his roots lay elsewhere, in Moravia and Silesia. The Tokyo, making some connections, performs the Quartet in A Minor on a program also featuring works by Janáček and Dvořák. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 25 at 8.)

LEIF OVE ANDSNES

The young Norwegian pianist, already a commanding presence, plays music by Schumann and Schubert (the Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. Oct. 26 at 3.)

MICHAEL SCHADE

Malcolm Martineau accompanies the elegant Met tenor in a performance of "Die Schöne Müllerin." (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Oct. 26 at 5.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

HALLOWEEN WARMUP

Beth Kimmerle stops by the Brooklyn lounge and record store Halcyon for a reading from her enticing new coffee-table book, "Candy: The Sweet History." Kimmerle, a onetime member of the product-development department at the Fannie May and Fannie Farmer candy companies, knows a thing or two about marketing—she'll also be making and handing out sweets. "Sugar has this amazing effect on people," she says. But the chocolate-truffle portion of the evening comes after the reading. "That way, you keep people captivated and interested," she adds. Not that Kimmerle should have any problem: her retro-flavored illustrated volume is as light and tasty as a box of Junior Mints. (227 Smith St. For more information, call 718-260-9299. Oct. 23 at 7:30.)

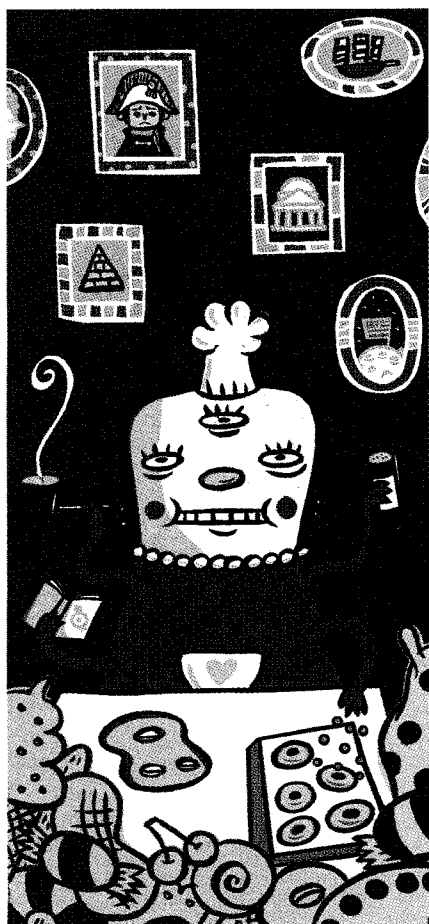
BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Following a four-year renovation of its landmark nineteenth-century headquarters, the Society cele-

brates its reopening with a new show—"Brooklyn Works: 400 Years of Making a Living in Brooklyn"—and an afternoon of children's activities and refreshments. (128 Pierrepont St., at Clinton St., Brooklyn Heights. 718-222-4111. Oct. 26, from noon to 5.)

READINGS

Oct. 23 at 7: Peter Canby and Andrew Solomon, contributors to "The Best American Travel Writing 2003," join Ian Frazier, the anthology's editor, for a night of tales set in such places as the Congo and Afghanistan. (The Explorers Club, 46 E. 70th St. 212-628-8383.) ♦ Oct. 23 at 7:30: The South African poet Ingrid de Kok and the local poet Scott Hightower read from their work. (Plaza Atrium, Fordham University, 113 W. 60th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Oct. 26 at 6: The actors Elizabeth Constable and Neal Medlyn join Polly Frost for a reading of her erotic horror stories. (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319.) ♦ Oct. 26 at 7: Todd McEwen offers passages from his novel "Who Sleeps with Katz." (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Oct. 28 at 7: The Kitchen's "Necessary Translations" series continues with a reading by the Basque poet Kirmen Uribe. The translator Elizabeth Macklin, the cultural historian Mark Kurlansky, and the musician Mikel Undargarin will also be on hand. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11.)



The history of candy, complete with a tasting, at Halcyon on October 23.

TALKS

Oct. 22 at 7: Following a screening of "The Human Stain," the director Robert Benton talks about working with Anthony Hopkins and Nicole Kidman on the film version of Philip Roth's novel. (Loews Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St. For ticket information, call the American Museum of the Moving Image at 718-784-4520.) ♦ Oct. 25 at 3: Neal Bascomb discusses "Higher: A Historic Race to the Sky and the Making of a City," his account of the construction of the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, and other local skyscrapers. (Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. 212-534-1672.)

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MOVIES OPENING

BEYOND BORDERS

Martin Campbell directed this thriller about a socialite (Angelina Jolie) who falls in love with a doctor (Clive Owen) in a war-torn African country. Opening Oct. 24.

THE BREAD, MY SWEET

Scott Baio plays an Italian-American man living in Pittsburgh and trying to reconcile his life as a corporate raider with his ownership of a beloved neighborhood bakery, in a drama directed by Melissa Martin. Opening Oct. 24. (Cinema Village.)

BROTHER BEAR

An animated film from Disney about a teen-age boy (voiced by Joaquin Phoenix) who must recover his human form after being transformed into a bear. Opening Oct. 24.

ELEPHANT

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 24. (Angelika Film Center.)

IN THE CUT

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 22. (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Sunshine Cinema.)

MORNING SUN

Carma Hinton, Geremie R. Barmé, and Richard Gordon directed this documentary about China's Cultural Revolution. In English and Mandarin. Opening Oct. 22. (Film Forum.)

THE PARTY'S OVER

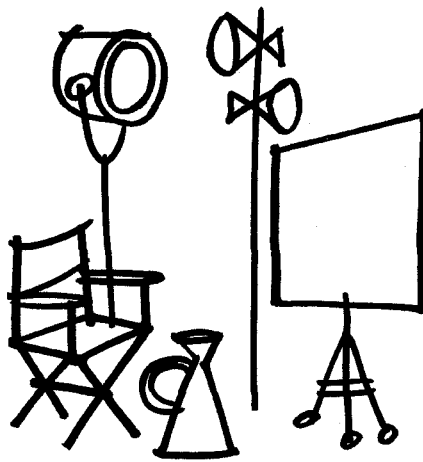
A travel documentary about the Presidential election of 2000, narrated by Philip Seymour Hoffman. Opening Oct. 24. (Cinema 1.)

RADIO

Michael Tollin's family drama is based on the true story of a mentally disabled man (Cuba Gooding, Jr.) who befriends the coach (Ed Harris) of a high-school football team. Opening Oct. 24.

SCARY MOVIE 3

A spoof of recent movies, directed by David Zucker. The cast includes Anna Faris, George Carlin, Pamela



Anderson, and Charlie Sheen. Opening Oct. 24.

THE SINGING DETECTIVE

Robert Downey, Jr., plays a bedridden crime novelist who has a fever dream in which he confuses his own life with the life of his protagonist, a nineteen-fifties Los Angeles private eye. Keith Gordon directed, from a script by Dennis Potter. Opening Oct. 24.

SISTER HELEN

A documentary about a Benedictine nun who runs a halfway house in the Bronx. Opening Oct. 24. (Quad Cinema.)

FILM NOTES

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

Well, it's different. Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini, directing together, have made a drama-documentary in which the drama and

the documentary look at each other but don't touch. The movie is about Harvey Pekar, a real and rusted-up gentleman from Cleveland. He works as a filing clerk, and his experiences have long been the subject of a comic strip, illustrated by—among others—Robert Crumb. So we get a good dose of Harvey. But we get an even better and funnier dose of Paul Giamatti, who plays an alternative Harvey, and who is framed, or sometimes drawn, in fond imitation of a comic book—the implication being that even the cruddiest lives can, in sympathetic hands, acquire shape and grace. The story, such as it is, moves from Harvey the record collector to Harvey the cancer sufferer to Harvey the chat-show guest. There is terrific supporting work from Hope Davis as Mrs. Pekar and from Judah Friedlander as Harvey's profoundly unusual friend Toby. Mild fame may have patronized these folks, but the movie pays them a comic homage that feels flattering, fast-witted, and true.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/18 & 25/03.) (Sunshine Cinema.)

AU HASARD BALTHAZAR

Robert Bresson's grave, oblique account of the life and suffering of a donkey, and the life and suffering of the people who mistreat him. It's a meditation on sin and saintliness. Considered a masterpiece by some, but others may find it painstakingly tedious and offensively holy. With Anne Wiazemsky as the passive, puffy-mouthed girl who falls in love with the cruel, thieving boy who is bound to make her miserable. Originally released in 1966. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Oct. 22-28.)

BRUTE FORCE

The title is accurate: this is a crudely powerful 1947 prison picture, produced by Mark Hellinger, written by Richard Brooks, and directed by Jules Dassin. The essentially old-fashioned material was modernized by the use of sadistic scenes and such devices as having the power-mad warden (Hume Cronyn) suggest a home-grown Hitler. This is the kind of movie that was once often called a man's picture; that is, fast, action-packed, pseudo-realistic. With Burt Lancaster, Charles Bickford, Roman Bohnen, Ella Raines, Yvonne De Carlo, and Vince Barnett.—*P.K.* (Gramercy Theatre; Oct. 26-27.)

DIRTY PRETTY THINGS

Okwe (Chiwetel Ejiofor), the African-in-exile hero of Stephen Frears's extraordinary London thriller, drives a cab during the day and works as a desk clerk in a good hotel at night; he keeps himself awake by chewing on some sort of African root. Like Travis Bickle, Robert De Niro's overstimulated psycho in "Taxi Driver," Okwe never really sleeps; unlike Bickle, Okwe is a good man, even a fanatically good man. In four or five frantic days, he tries to save another illegal immigrant, Senay (Audrey Tautou), from the clutches of the cheerfully sinister manager of the hotel in which they both work. Señor Juan (Sergi Lopez), as he's known, offers forged passports to illegals in return for a kidney or some other organ that he can sell on the black market. There are a few grisly scenes in the elegant upper rooms of the hotel, but "Dirty Pretty Things" is not a violent thriller. It might be called a social thriller—a tightly knit suspense film that reveals more of the lives of immigrants in London than the most scrupulously earnest documentaries. The great cinematographer Chris Menges keeps the images cool and crisp. There's no murk, no "atmosphere." However harried, Okwe, a great chess player, has to see every move in advance as he defends himself and his friends from the treachery on all sides.—*David Denby* (9/15/03) (84th Street Sixplex, Sunshine Cinema, and Sutton 1 and 2.)

HOUSE OF BAMBOO

In Samuel Fuller's 1955 thriller, an American lawman (Robert Stack) infiltrates a crew of former Yankee servicemen who are knocking over U.S. ammo trains in Japan. It's Fuller at his punchy best: he crams multitudes of pulp-fiction ideas into a swift hundred-minute running time without letting any of their juice dribble away. His piquant



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notions include a homoerotic bond between the Mob leader (Robert Ryan) and his right-hand man (Cameron Mitchell) and the hero's romance with a Mobster's Japanese widow (Shirley Yamaguchi). Add CinemaScope slabs of postwar Tokyo and a climax set on a rooftop playground whirligig and the result is both an exotic remake of the 1948 F.B.I. movie "The Street with No Name" and a poor man's "The Third Man."—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; Oct. 24 and Oct. 26.)

INTOLERABLE CRUELTY

Wagging his eyebrows and smiling broadly, George Clooney does some of his most self-confident acting yet as a sharp Los Angeles divorce lawyer, and Catherine Zeta-Jones is suitably deadpan as a voracious beauty who marries wealthy men and then finds spurious reasons to dump them and take their money. As these two lock horns, this Coen-brothers movie seems, for a while, to be the kind of glossy, high-style dialogue comedy from the forties that both celebrated and satirized heartless people with a gift for gab. But then the Coens fall into their usual goony-bird comedy games, and, though some of the jokes are funny, they are funny at a much lower level. Geoffrey Rush has a good bit at the beginning as a Hollywood sleaze who likes to sing along with his car radio. Also with Cedric the Entertainer and Edward Herrmann, surprisingly cast as a dirty old man.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

KILL BILL—VOL. 1

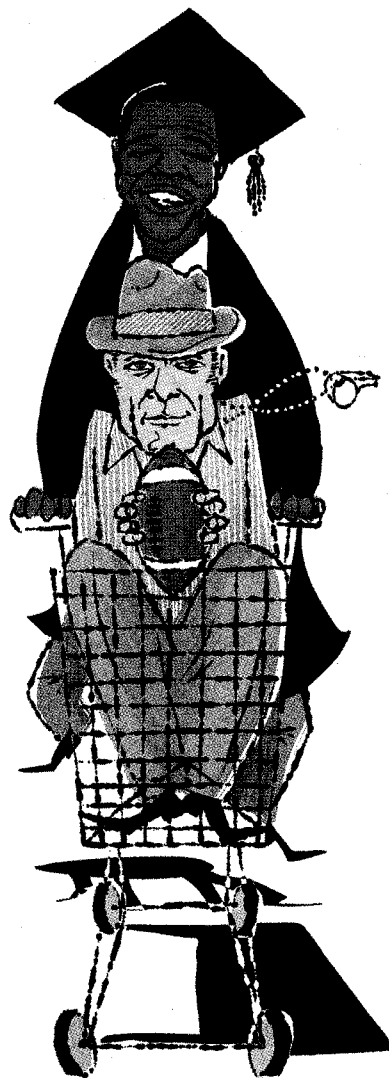
In this Quentin Tarantino fantasy pastiche of samurai and martial-arts films, the trunk of a body, its head lopped off, will spurt blood like a fountain. We know that the non-stop violence is not meant to be real: for starters, the blood looks like cranberry juice. Yet Tarantino is working in a photographic medium, and the real-world associations are not so easy to shrug off. Tarantino's heroine, Uma Thurman, kills another female warrior in front of the woman's little girl, and the child doesn't react. Tarantino wants the shock of a mother killed in front of her daughter without the audience undergoing any discomfort at all. The movie is what's formally known as decadence and commonly known as crap. Saying that it's an homage to long-established genres in Hong Kong doesn't reduce its pop-nihilistic stupidity. Some of the sequences have a scintillating visual flair, but you come out feeling nothing at all. And this is only the first half.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (Astor Plaza, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Nothing much happens in the new film by the writer-director Sofia Coppola, but she has first-rate abilities as an observer and as a rueful comedian, and much of the movie is sweetly funny and satisfying. In Tokyo, a burned-out American movie star named Bob Harris (Bill Murray) shows up to appear in a whiskey ad. Stranded in a sleekly pompous modern hotel, he can't connect with anything or even sleep, but he does hook up (chastely) with a very young woman, Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), whose fashion-photographer husband (Giovanni Ribisi) is rapidly slipping away from her. Both Bob and Charlotte are in emotional limbo, and they become an odd, inappropriate couple. Murray has never been this quiet, this wary, this subtly acid before—or this warm, either. The drama of the movie, such as it is, lies in seeing just how much he will respond and when.—*D.D.* (9/15/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE MAGDALENE SISTERS

A scalding picture from Peter Mullan, set in Ireland in the nineteen-sixties. Three girls are sent to a Magdalene Asylum—one of a network of institutions to which wayward young women were consigned by their disapproving families. The asylums



Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Ed Harris in "Radio," opening Oct. 24.

were run by Roman Catholic nuns; in this case, the presiding spirit is Sister Bridget (Geraldine McEwan), who counts her money in secret and speaks to her charges with a forked tongue. Finally, the trio of friends—played by Anne-Marie Duff, Dorothy Duffy, and Nora-Jane Noone—make their escape, as if from a prisoner-of-war camp. The system was certainly crushing, but it has inspired Mullan—a fine actor, whose previous film as director, "Orphans," was a scabrous Glaswegian comedy—to deliver his most intemperate work, which lashes out at the Catholic Church with the same hardness of heart that Sister Bridget and her colleagues display in their running of the asylum. You come away from the movie not just convinced but cowed.—*A.L.* (8/11/03) (Empire 25.)

MYSTIC RIVER

Clint Eastwood's sombre masterpiece, from a novel by Dennis Lehane (Brian Helgeland did the adaptation), is about a working-class Catholic community in Boston held in thrall by an old crime. Back in the seventies, one of three eleven-year-old boys who were close friends was taken away by two men pretending to be cops and sexually assaulted for days before he finally escaped. But it turns out that Dave (Tim Robbins) never escaped at all. Twenty-five years later, he is still shrouded in dreams and terror, and his two friends, Sean (Kevin Bacon), a homicide detective, and Jimmy (Sean Penn), an ex-con who runs a corner grocery, still feel the shame of not helping him. When Jimmy's nineteen-year-old daughter is murdered, the three are uneasily brought back together again. The movie's feeling for the neigh-

borhood milieu is so convincing because there's no distinction between background and foreground—everything we see (faces, living rooms, back yards, weather, battered old cars) is dramatically relevant. Eastwood directs in a gray, end-of-day light and with a minimum of camera rhetoric; he lets the script and the actors do the work. Bacon tightens his facial muscles into a mask; Robbins looks puffy and frightened; and Penn does a few semi-psychotic soliloquies in which he takes off into the stratosphere, joining Marlon Brando as one of the great tragic actors of the screen. With Marcia Gay Harden and Laura Linney, both in devastating form.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

PARTY MONSTER

A superficial and murky tale about the Manhattan party promoter and club-kid king Michael Alig, whose notoriety stems from his participation in the killing of a drug-dealing pal. The co-directors Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato attempt a fevered glimpse of the trippy drug-saturated parties and the fabulous characters who created them, but their film adds up to little more than a series of lacklustre re-creations. And, although the clubbing costumes are a hoot, Macaulay Culkin, in the lead role, lacks the childish whimsy that made Alig's crime such a disturbing moment in New York night life. Only Seth Green, who plays Alig's mentor, James St. James, provides the narcissistic chirpiness that made clubland so exotically self-destructive.—*Bruce Diones* (Angelika Film Center.)

PIECES OF APRIL

Katie Holmes continues to distance herself from her "Dawson's Creek" past, in this sensitive drama written and directed by Peter Hedges. The apple-cheeked actress surrounds her eyes with mascara and slumps her shoulders as April, a rebellious daughter living a shabby-chic life style on the Lower East Side. Her transformation works, for the most part, but the movie's real center of gravity is Patricia Clarkson, as April's mother, suffering from breast cancer. It's a challenging role; Hedges wrote the character as someone who can no longer tolerate sympathy, and Clarkson manages to express vulnerability along with the dry, caustic wit of a woman who has made her reckoning with death. The movie has April reuniting with her mother for Thanksgiving, but it's not a depressing or cheaply sentimental story. Oliver Platt, Alison Pill, Alice Drummond, and Derek Luke lend fine support as family and boyfriend. Shot on digital video, in a style that is sometimes claustrophobic.—*Michael Agger* (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)

RUNAWAY JURY

Though this legal thriller has been billed as Hoffman v. Hackman, the two screen legends have only one scene together, when they square off for a crisp back-and-forth in the men's room. What a letdown—as is the rest of this convoluted adaptation of yet another John Grisham novel. The courtroom should have been the center of the action. But, while Hoffman is cast as the principled attorney putting the gun companies on trial, Hackman remains off-site as a high-tech jury consultant who watches the proceedings through hidden cameras. It's left to John Cusack and Rachel Weisz, who play a mysterious team also bent on manipulating the jury, to confront Hackman. Not exactly a title bout. Gary Fleder directed, with a heavy hand. New Orleans provides the murkiness.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, 62nd & Broadway, and 34th Street Theatre.)

SCARFACE

Directed by Brian De Palma from a script by Oliver Stone, this two-hour-and-forty-nine minute remake of the 1932 "Scarface" has the length of an epic but not the texture of an epic, and its dramatic arc is faulty. Al Pacino's Tony Montana, a Cuban who scrambles to the top of the Miami drug world, is just starting to learn the ropes and then, sated with wealth and dope, he's moldy. The

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

middle of the movie is missing; we get the after-maths but not the capers. For the first three-quarters of an hour, this 1983 film feels like the beginning of a new-style, post-“Godfather” gangster epic—hot and raw, like a spaghetti Western. But when Tony gets everything he wants, he’s a pig rooting around in money and cocaine, and, as things go wrong, he snorts more and more. Probably all this excess is intended to be satirical—snorting coke turns into a running gag. But the scenes are so shapeless that we don’t know at what point we are supposed to laugh. The picture is peddling macho primitivism and at the same time making it absurd. It’s a druggy spectacle—manic yet exhausted, with De Palma entering into the derangement and trying to bring something larger out of Tony’s debauchery. The whole feeling of the movie is limp. This may be the only action picture that turns into an allegory of impotence.—P.K. (Empire 25.)

SCHOOL OF ROCK

Fans of Jack Black, your cup runneth over. He plays Dewey Finn, a mediocre but enthusiastic guitarist who bluffs his way into a substitute-teaching position at an exclusive private elementary school. At first, the job is purgatory, but then it’s paradise: some of the fifth graders turn out to be skilled classical musicians, and soon Black begins instructing them in the finer points of power chords. The movie nostalgically celebrates the liberating power of classic rock—the way it could impart coolness to all true believers. The kids top the charts in adorableness, and their acting, for better or worse, belongs to the amateurish tradition of “The Bad News Bears.” Mike White’s somewhat (for him) generic script sets the stage for Black to cut loose. The actor has a knack for moving his body in funny ways, and he sings and prances for the camera in a risky and aerobic performance. Joan Cusack offers fine support as the tightly wound principal. Richard Linklater directed, with his trademark touch of conveying milieu.—M.A.

(Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE STATION AGENT

The writer and director Tom McCarthy has turned his attention to a New Jersey backwater and come up with something lyrical, taciturn, and stripped of sentimentality. Peter Dinklage plays Fin, a dwarf who inherits a cabinlike home beside a railroad track in Morris County, Newfoundland. Fin loves trains and not much else—hardly surprising, given that the world has shown him little more than a laugh and a sneer—and he is none too thrilled when his quiet space is invaded. Over time, though, he warms to the invaders: Joe (Bobby Cannavale), loud and lonely, who sells coffee and hot dogs from a neighboring van, and Olivia (Patricia Clarkson), a painter, still mourning the loss of a young son. The three of them fall in with one another, then fall out, then gradually fall back in; like some of the best short stories, the picture evades grandeur, mature enough to linger on what nearly happens. None of the central performers put a foot wrong, and McCarthy takes care not to insist that small is beautiful; rather, he and Dinklage leave us reflecting that small can be angry, tired, and tough.—A.L. (10/6/03) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

SYLVIA

If Mel Brooks had got his hands on the story of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, we could have been treated to a chorus line of suicidal poets, chanting “It’s a Gas!” As it is, we must make do with this bleak account of intertwining lives. Plath (Gwyneth Paltrow) meets Ted Hughes (Daniel Craig) in 1956 and marries him shortly afterward, to the polite consternation of her mother (Blythe Danner). The action switches from a morose England to a bright and bracing America, then back again; the second half of the picture leads us through the

plunging of Plath’s moods, the publication of her poems, and her death, in 1963. The screenwriter, John Brownlow, and the director, Christine Jeffs, handle this material with patience and tact, and Paltrow is unafraid to show the sour and simmering side of her heroine. We come away convinced of the poets’ shared intensity, and deeply relieved that we are able to observe it from a safe distance.—A.L. (10/20/03) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TO BE AND TO HAVE

Lean, quick, and devastatingly adroit at the age of fifty-five, the teacher Georges Lopez presides over a one-room schoolhouse in this marvelous documentary shot in the Auvergne region of France. Monsieur Lopez divides the children, ages three to eleven, into three groups, and enforces strict discipline. No one could call his methods progressive; no one could call them ineffective, either. Watching the intensity of his work from moment to moment, child by child, is a demonstration of craft exercised on a level at which skill and love have become indistinguishable. The filmmaker Nicolas Philibert brings the same kind of dedication to his own work. The children are great, unwary camera subjects, and Philibert gives us beautifully composed views of them, granting us enough time to observe each child closely, imagine his circumstances, and see what he does or doesn’t learn. The documentary is a deeply satisfying aesthetic and pedagogic experience, though Americans may wonder how such terrific children can become such irritating adults. In French.—D.D. (9/29/03) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN

A soft-core renovation fantasy for educated women. Frances (Diane Lane), a San Francisco writer and teacher dumped by her adulterous husband, goes on a bus tour of Tuscany and falls in love with a crumbling old villa. After many blissfully undramatic episodes—an ancient wall

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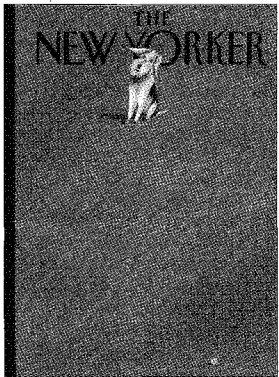
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falls down, a toilet mysteriously emits boiling water—the house gets scraped, plastered, painted, and gardenized back into shape. It's Frances's life, of course, that really needs work. Luckily, in Rome, she finds Marcello (Raoul Bova)—yard-wide shoulders, blue eyes, all of Italian manhood in a white suit—and drives off with him in his Alfa Romeo convertible. There's a lot more of this sort of harmless, pleasant, inconsequential stuff, with much of it redeemed by the good humor of the writer-director Audrey Wells, who serves up clichés and makes fun of them at the same time. With Sandra Oh as a sharp-tongued Bay Area lesbian friend of Frances's who arrives in Tuscany to have a baby.—*D.D.* (9/29/03) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.)

WONDERLAND

This is not the story of John Holmes, the pasha of porno, who bestrode the world of the skin flick with an ease and authority that made life pretty interesting for anybody lying underneath. Instead, it is the story of what Holmes did next—his greasy twilight, in the early nineteen-eighties, when his demeanor and daily routine became no more savory than that of any other cokehead. He was mixed up in a multiple murder, the savagery of which is pressed upon us, and the moral consequence of which appears to be "Stick to blue movies and stay off drugs." Why the director, James Cox, should expect us to leap on this sorry saga with enthusiasm is a mystery; indeed, as if worried by the grind of his narrative, he tries over and over to chop and chivvy it into a state of high excitement. Holmes is played by Val Kilmer, so thoroughly spaced out that he could slip without noticing into another movie, or, for that matter, another galaxy.—*A.L.* (10/6/03) (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

BUS 174

Film Forum.

THE FLOWER OF EVIL

Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

OUT OF TIME

Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

PREY FOR ROCK AND ROLL

Sunshine Cinema.

TIBET: CRY OF THE SNOW LION

Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
(212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave.
at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
(212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St.
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Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway
at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.

19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—
Movies featuring the actress Shirley Yamaguchi. ♦
Oct. 24 at 7:30 and Oct. 26 at 6:30: "House of
Bamboo" (†). ♦ Oct. 26 at 2: "Japanese War Bride"
(1952, King Vidor). ♦ Oct. 26 at 4: "Madame
White Snake" (1963, Shiro Toyoda; in Mandarin).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—
Through Oct. 28: "I Don't Know What I Am
Doing," films by and about Andy Warhol. Oct. 22
at 7:30: "My Hustler" (1965). ♦ Oct. 23 at 7:30:
"Since" (1966) and "Couch" (1964). ♦ Oct. 24 at
7:30: "Kiss" (1963) and "Blow Job" (1963). ♦
Oct. 25 at 7: "Chelsea Girls" (1966). ♦ Oct. 26 at
3, 6, and 9:10: "Basquiat" (1996, Julian Schna-
bel). ♦ Oct. 28 at 7:30: "Visions of Warhol" (1963-
1990, Jonas Mekas, Willard Maas, and Marie
Menken). ♦ Sixties films. Oct. 27 at 4:30, 6:50, and
9:10: "Wild in the Streets" (1968, Barry Shear).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-
8110)—Oct. 22-28 at 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:20, and
9:20: "Au Hasard Balthazar" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Nov. 4:
The films of Isabelle Huppert. Oct. 28 at 12:30,
3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The King's Daughters" (2000,
Patricia Mazuy; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE

127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Oct.
23: A retrospective of the nineteen-twenties avant-
garde director Germaine Dulac. All films are in
French. Oct. 23 at 2: "The Beautiful Woman With-
out Mercy" (1920). ♦ Oct. 23 at 4: "The Seashell
and the Clergyman" (1927). ♦ Special screening:
Anita Loos. Oct. 23 at 6: "Red-Headed Woman"
(1932, Jack Conway), introduced by the film
scholar Cari Beauchamp. ♦ Through Oct. 27: "In
Memoriam: Katharine Hepburn, Gregory Peck,
Hume Cronyn." Oct. 24 at 2: "A Bill of Divorce-
ment" (1932, George Cukor). ♦ Oct. 26 at 2 and
Oct. 27 at 6: "Brute Force" (†). ♦ Special screening.
Oct. 24 at 8:30: "La Petite Lili" (2003, Claude
Miller; in French), introduced by the director.

SUNSHINE CINEMA

139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight
movies. Oct. 24-25: "Tim Burton's The Night-
mare Before Christmas" (1993, Henry Selick).

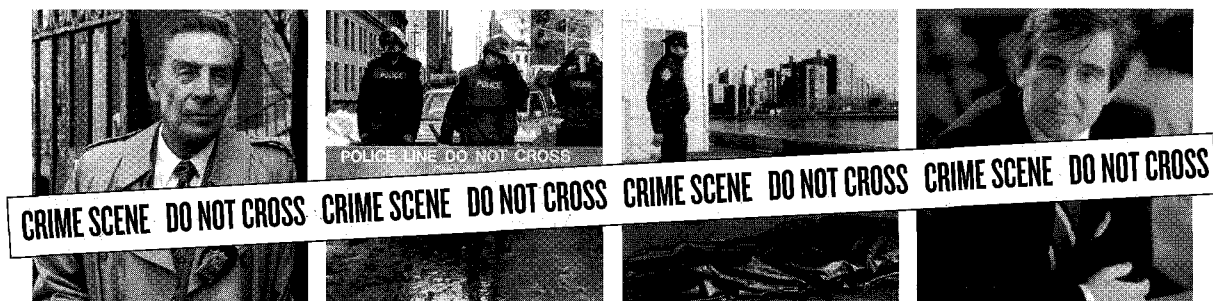
THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-
864-5400)—Oct. 25 at 6:30 and Oct. 26 at 2
and 6:30: "The Decalogue: Parts I and II" (1996,
Krzysztof Kieslowski; in Polish).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Nov.
5: "Yasujiro Ozu: A Centennial Celebration." All
films are in Japanese. Oct. 22 at 1 and 6: "That
Night's Wife" (1930). ♦ Oct. 22 at 3:15 and 8:15,
Oct. 26 at 6, and Oct. 28 at 3: "Tokyo Twilight"
(1957). ♦ Oct. 23 at 2 and Oct. 25 at 4 and 8:30:
"Equinox Flower" (1957). ♦ Oct. 23 at 4:30, Oct.
26 at 3, and Oct. 28 at 1: "Good Morning"
(1959). ♦ Oct. 24 at 1 and 6: "The Lady and the
Beard" (1931). ♦ Oct. 24 at 3:15 and 8: "Tokyo
Chorus" (1931). ♦ Oct. 25 at 2 and 6:30: "I Was
Born, But" (1932).

Ripped from the headlines, torn from the screen: The crime scenes of *Law & Order*.

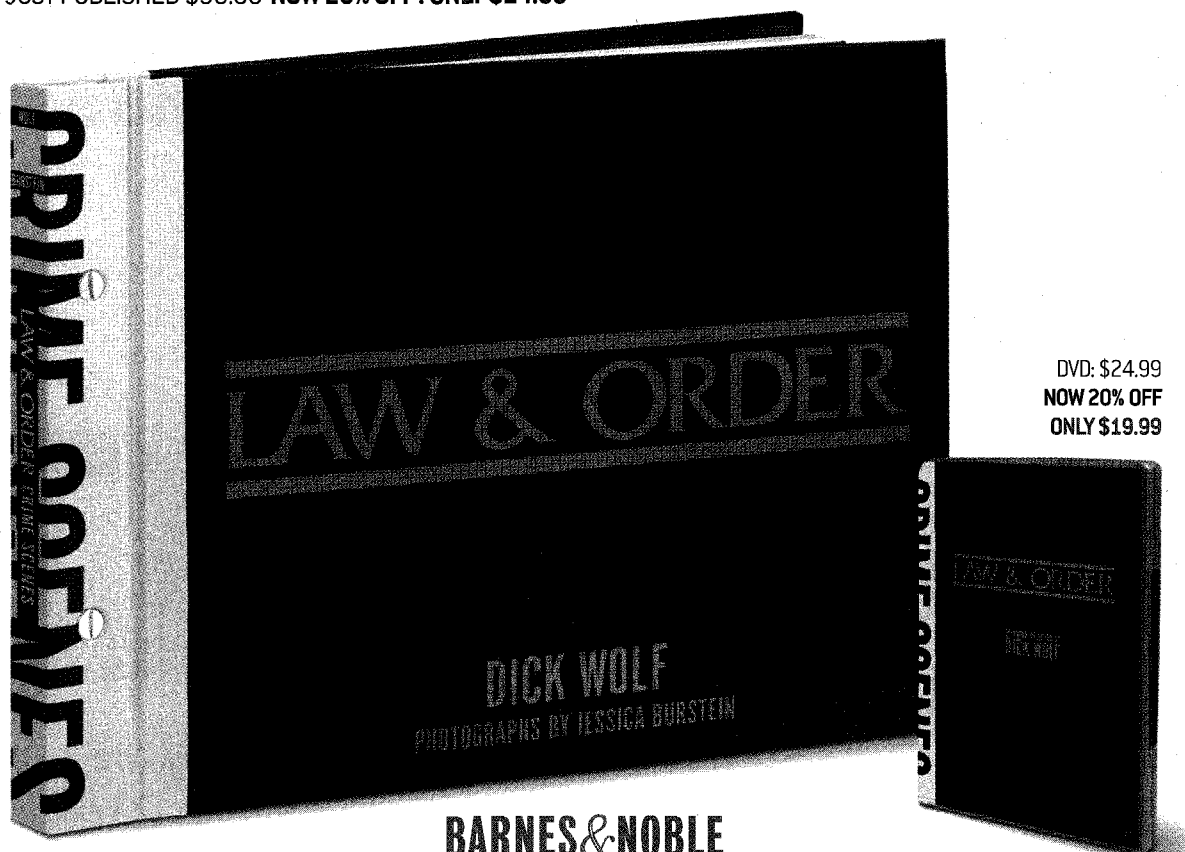


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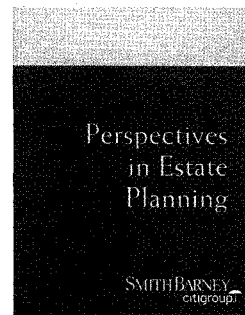
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT RUSH IN REHAB



“We do not need General Clark or any of the rest of you liberals. We don’t need to change the definition of patriotism in order to conform to the antiwar, hate-America-first radicalism of the Democrat leadership. And that’s what this is all about.”

In case you don’t happen to be a regular listener to “The Rush Limbaugh Show,” the above is a fair sample of the sort of thing the star of the show has been saying lately, or at any rate was saying until a week ago, when he checked in to a drug rehabilitation center. It’s not very different from what he’s been saying throughout the twenty years he’s been talking about politics on the radio. We know the sample is fair, because it was the featured quote last Thursday on the home page of Limbaugh’s own Web site, emblazoned in big blue letters right next to the smiling photograph of the patient himself. Limbaugh’s target this time was Wesley Clark, because Clark is a leading candidate for the Democratic Presidential nomination. As a four-star general, Clark led NATO’s first and so far only major military action, which put a stop to ethnic cleansing in Kosovo; as a combat officer in Vietnam, he was severely wounded and awarded the silver star, the

bronze star, and a purple heart. The person impugning his patriotism, Limbaugh, sat out the war in Vietnam—though not very comfortably, one must assume, since, as Joe Conason noted in *Salon*, the future scourge of cowards and slackers avoided the draft on account of “a persistent boil on his backside.”

Limbaugh is a prime example of what is known as a Chicken Hawk—a noisy, preening master of the martial art of talking who, back when it was a question of getting anywhere near harm’s way for the sake of his country, discovered that he had (as Vice-President Cheney once put it, explaining his own absence from the fray) “other priorities.” He has now joined another elite corps—the Vice Versa Virtuecrats, they might be called—whose members crusade against “moral relativism” and in favor of absolute standards of right and

wrong backed up by draconian punishments while indulging themselves in devilment on the side. Like Newt Gingrich, who vowed to attack Bill Clinton in every speech for hiding his sad little dalliance with Monica Lewinsky while he himself was carrying on a years-long affair with a congressional staffer young enough to be his daughter, and William J. Bennett, who made millions promoting flinty self-discipline while gambling away comparable amounts in Las Vegas fleshpots, Limbaugh took a stern line on demon dope (“If people are violating the law by doing drugs, they ought to be accused and they ought to be convicted and they ought to be sent up”) while himself possessing and consuming controlled substances in prodigious quantities. In Limbaugh’s case, the difficulty goes beyond an embarrassing inconsistency between professed beliefs and private behavior, because the “problem” he has acknowledged having—being “addicted to prescription pain medication”—correlates strongly with committing acts that the law defines as crimes.

Limbaugh’s colleagues in the right-wing jabber industry have come up with a consistent set of talking points in making the case that, in Ann Coulter’s words, “Rush’s behavior was not all that dissolute.” One point is that it was “highly courageous” of Limbaugh to admit his addiction, as Brent Bozell wrote. This would be more persuasive if Limbaugh’s admission had come before rather than after his addiction was described in detail in a *National Enquirer* story—a story whose essential outlines have since been





confirmed by the non-supermarket press and whose particulars have been disputed by no one. (Limbaugh himself—presumably on the advice of his lawyer, Roy Black, whose other celebrity clients have included William Kennedy Smith and Marv Albert—has said only that the “stories you’ve heard contain inaccuracies and distortions.”) Another point is that Limbaugh’s ability to do his job while addicted is a testament to his greatness. “If this is what he’s like on painkillers, imagine when he’s off them!” Coulter exclaimed, adding, “Whoa! Set him loose once he’s gone through detox!”

A third talking point is that Limbaugh is not like other junkies—the bad kind, who use drugs like heroin and cocaine. Sean Hannity, the Fox TV host, discerned a “difference between somebody who, as part of a medical treatment, had these things prescribed and it got out of hand over time, and somebody who is using drugs recreationally.” Neal Boortz, an Atlanta-based radio shouter, said on MSNBC, “The addiction happened while he was under a legal regimen of these drugs. That is not at all the way people get addicted to heroin.” And G. Gordon Liddy, the Watergate burglar turned pundit, said, “I would distinguish Rush’s situation from someone who was a recreational drug user and was caught playing with fire and got addicted—moved up from marijuana to cocaine or something of that sort.”

Actually, under federal law there is no distinction between Oxycontin, Limbaugh’s reported pill of choice, and drugs like cocaine, methadone, and opiates. All are Schedule II drugs, which have medical uses but a high potential for abuse, and simple possession of any of them is punishable by up to a year’s imprisonment. Though Limbaugh may well have been introduced to painkillers via a doctor’s prescription, the suggestion that he became addicted to them under a doctor’s care is almost certainly false. So is the suggestion that he wasn’t taking them “recreationally”—i.e., to get high. The prescribed dose of Oxycontin, one tablet every twelve hours, is usually sufficient to relieve severe pain. The *Enquirer* has Limbaugh purchasing nearly twelve thousand during a four-month period in 2001—enough to soothe his back troubles for sixteen years.

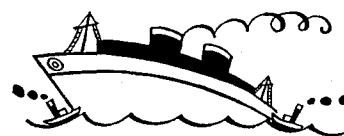
Limbaugh deserves compassion no less (and no more) than any other drug addict. It would be a travesty of justice to lock him up for ingesting chemicals, an activity whose only victim, if any, has been himself. But the four hundred and fifty thousand Americans already in jail for breaking the drug laws also represent a failure of justice, and an even bigger failure of policy. (The United States imprisons more people for drug violations than the European Union imprisons for all causes combined, and the E.U.’s population exceeds the U.S.’s by a hundred million.) By the same token, it would be

a travesty if Oxycontin—which has eased the sufferings of millions—were to be demonized as other psychoactive drugs have been demonized. Even if Limbaugh was using his drugs less to relieve pain than to procure pleasure, or if the pain he sought to relieve was less physical than existential, that may have been a problem, but it shouldn’t be a crime.

Limbaugh’s current sojourn in drug treatment is his third. If he fails again, he should have a fourth chance, and a fifth. Perhaps he will reflect upon the fact that if he weren’t quite so lucky—if he were poorer and darker of skin, and if he had been obliged from the start to seek his treatment under the tender auspices of the criminal-justice system—he would already have had his third strike. Such a change of heart seems unlikely; drug rehabilitation comes easier than the political kind. Limbaugh may be a Chicken Hawk in the war on drugs, but that doesn’t mean he deserves to be cannon fodder.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

S.I. DISPATCH THE WRECK



Many in the first wave of nine-to-five commuters returning to Staten Island last Wednesday learned of the day’s calamity only when they’d reached the waterfront. At the South Ferry terminal, down by the Battery, where the wind was blowing fifty m.p.h.—street signs rattling, hats flying off—Department of Transportation personnel distributed handwritten flyers that began, “All ferry service has been suspended.” Would-be passengers were steered onto shuttle buses for the much less direct land route: Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, B.Q.E., Verrazano Bridge.

On the bus, the cell phones came out, and confused travellers gradually learned the ghastly news from their friends watching television: At 3:20 P.M., the Andrew J. Barberi, one of nine ferries in the fleet, had careered off course and slammed into a concrete pier on Staten Island. At least ten people were dead and dozens were badly injured; as though in a war zone, severed limbs had been found in

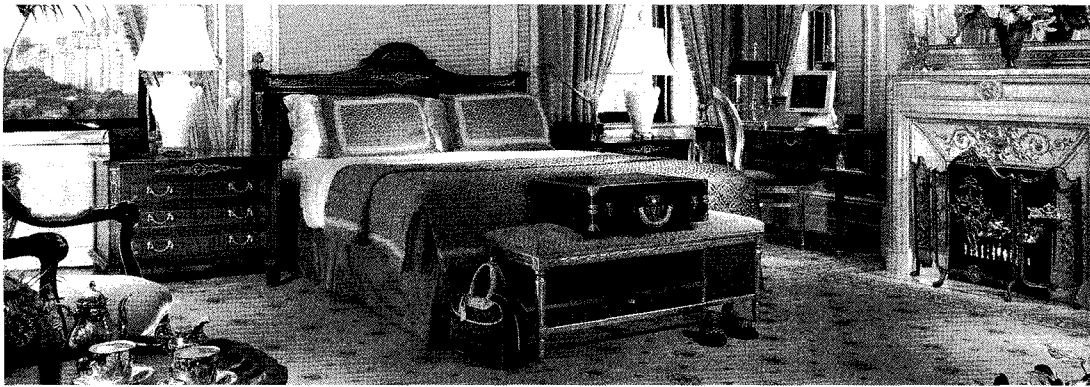


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the debris. The phones on the bus kept ringing.

"Hello, Uncle Louie? I'm fine. We're all fine. No, I was at work at the time."

"Yeah, I'm all right, I'm just stuck in traffic—that's the worst that's happened to me."

"What scares me the most is that's where I always sit, on the lower level by the window. Supposedly, it split the side of the boat—*plffff*—like a can opener."

The shuttle reached St. George as darkness settled in, the ninety-minute crawl a reminder of the superiority of the water route. It was a short, cold walk down to the terminal. The mangled ferry was cordoned off with yellow police tape, and the scene had been cleared of the dead and wounded.

Up on Bay Street, at the Cargo Café, Scott LoBaido, the self-proclaimed "unofficial mayor of the middle-class workingman," was buying drinks for his friends while watching the Cubs game on TV. LoBaido, who is thirty-eight, and a fourth-generation Staten Islander, has achieved local renown for his political activism—recently, he stormed City Hall in a Superman suit to protest Mayor Bloomberg's smoking ban—and for his art work, much of which hangs on the walls at the Cargo Café. (Above the bar: "The NY Giants," depicting a firefighter, a cop, and Rudy Giuliani on horseback, slaying a dragon.)

"A friend of mine, one of the customers here, he was on the boat at the time, and he came right here afterwards," LoBaido said. "Big, tough guy, but you could see the pain, the tears in his eyes. He was down on the lower level. He saw ugliness. Without getting into detail, he seen some gruesome stuff, and I feel for the guy." LoBaido had a pencil behind his ear and a cell phone decorated with stars and stripes.

"A lot of people look at me for positive uplift when tragedy happens," he said. He pointed to a painting over by the men's room, of an arm reaching up toward a cluster of stars. "I did that the day after the space shuttle blew up. The seven stars represent the seven victims."

He closed his eyes and held his head in his hands. "Everybody says that their borough is great, but Staten Island is such a *community*," LoBaido said. "We lost two hundred and sixty-seven people in 9/11, and the pain still lingers, and

then a tragedy like this—it's horrifying. I dread going to sleep tonight. To wake up and see the paper, see the names of those poor people that were killed—I'm most likely going to know somebody."

LoBaido didn't go to sleep that night. After the ballgame, he retired to his studio up the hill and began painting. He finished at around nine the next morning. He brought the piece back to the bar and hung it next to the jukebox: oil-on-canvas; a giant candle, encircled with a faint blue outline in the shape of Staten Island, burning brightly in the dark.

By Thursday afternoon, as the investigation into the pilot's bizarre behavior continued—after the crash, he'd rushed home, slit his wrists, and shot himself with a pellet gun—a steely cynicism had returned with the daily grind. Only a half-dozen men took seats down front on the starboard side of the John F. Kennedy for the three-o'clock from Manhattan, but upstairs a herd of journalists, tourists, and commuters crowded onto the bow observation deck.

"Were you on the boat yesterday?" one man asked another.

"No, but you want the straight story? I'll give it to you." He gestured toward the cameramen and said, "They ride this shit when there's a disaster, but they don't ride it every *day*." The boat docked uneventfully, if slowly, and was met by a handful of TV crews. "Hey, smile, everybody," the man said, grimly. "Get yourself on the news."

David Rabin, the owner of the Cargo Café, was one of the passengers disembarking for the cameras. Back at the bar, he looked out the window as a police department R.V. emblazoned with the words "Command Center," which had been parked nearby for the past twenty-four hours, pulled into traffic and drove away. "There it goes, that's it—the Command Center is leaving," Rabin said. "This city is amazing, you know that? Command Center," he repeated. "And there's a precinct just one block away."

Steve, a regular, came in, and said hi to Michelle, who was tending bar. He ordered a rum-and-Coke, then noticed LoBaido's new painting and walked over to take a look. "It's nice," he said, quietly. "Hey, Michelle, you got a copy of the *Advance*? I want to see who was on the boat."

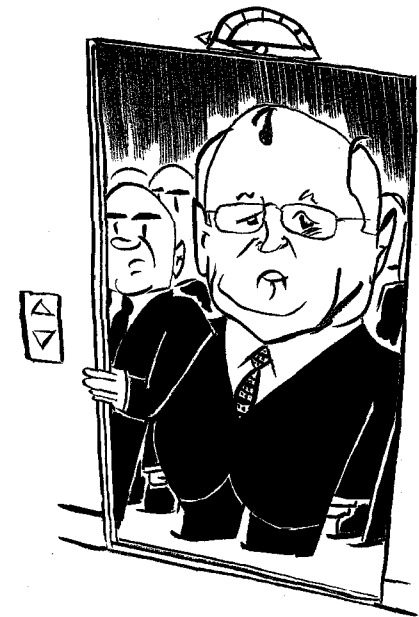
—Ben McGrath

DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY NOT LOST IN TRANSLATION



The effects of globalization notwithstanding, cheek-kissing protocol remains something of a mystery, resolved with regional pique depending on whom you meet and where you go: the Americans do it once, the Europeans twice, and the Brazilians as many times as you'll let them.

The other day at the Pierre Hotel, Mikhail Gorbachev, the man who ended the Cold War, was in an elevator administering an impromptu lesson in how newly cosmopolitan Russia deals with the question. All but one of the seven men in the elevator were Russian: Pavel Palazhchenko, his translator and adviser; a bodyguard; and several aides. Even the elevator operator was a Soviet émigré, and he told Gorbachev that he re-



Mikhail Gorbachev

membered him from a previous visit to the Pierre.

"How's life?" Gorbachev asked, in Russian.

"Nothing changes." He shrugged.

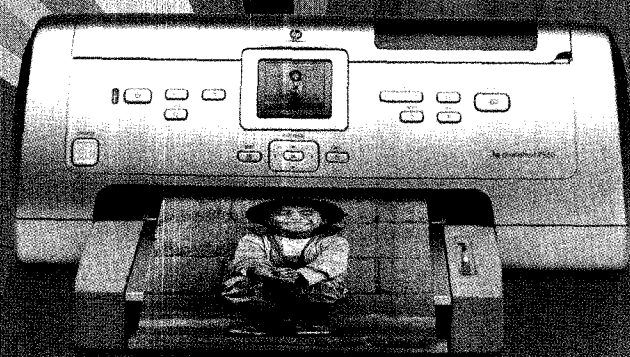
A cell phone trilled, and everyone reached for his pocket. Gorbachev looked quizzically at his tiny Motorola. It was silent.

"See, if they made one with 'Suliko,'



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then I'd know it was mine," he said, referring to the Georgian folk song. ("I saw a rose in the forest / From which dew ran like tears / In my sorrow, I cried, Suliko!")

The only woman in the elevator was also a non-Russian: Miranda, a graduate student at Harvard, who helps plan Gorbachev's appearances in the States. The Pierre's elevators are extravagantly appointed but not exactly spacious, and Gorbachev was pressed next to her in a corner. He was wearing a crisp white shirt and a red tie. She had a wired communication device in her ear.

"You are so wonderful!" Gorbachev said to her in Russian as the elevator made its way down from the sixteenth floor. "What would we do without you!" Palazhchenko dutifully translated. Then Gorbachev took her by the shoulders, leaned in, and pecked her on both cheeks.

Miranda blushed and began to pull away.

"No, no, in Russia, we do it three times," Gorbachev said. Palazhchenko did his part.

"For you, Mr. Gorbachev, four, five—as many as you want," Miranda said.

By this time, the elevator had arrived on the second floor, where Gorbachev was going to meet with supporters. His entourage filed out. Gorbachev remained in the elevator, where he obligingly leaned in for No. 4. The elevator operator kept his finger on the button marked "Door open."

Eventually, Gorbachev strode out. "This makeup they put on!" he exclaimed. "My lips almost got stuck to her cheek."

—Boris Fishman

DEPT. OF SIGNAGE THE MAN AND THE HAND



On the one hand, pedestrians ought to be impressed by the uncharacteristic stealth with which city workers have changed most of New York's Walk/Don't Walk signals. On the other, they should be concerned; if such a radical transformation can go more or less unobserved, we may be even more vulnerable to, say, a terrorist attack than previously imagined. Picture the city try-

ing to repaint every taxi in town U.N. blue—people wouldn't stand for it! But, if you'll notice, pedestrians, for whatever reason, have kept on obeying and disobeying the crosswalk commands, with the usual resignation and disdain, as though the new signs weren't, in fact, completely foreign and strange.

The old Walk/Don't Walk signs,



which have been around for half a century, are being replaced with new signs that feature the federal (and very international-looking) symbols for walking and not-supposed-to-be-walking: a white figure in mid-stride (Walk) and a large orange hand in mid-halt! (Don't Walk). The city is changing all eighty-five-thousand signs, at a cost of \$28.2 million. The job started in 2000, in Queens; by February the Zurichification of our street corners should be complete. The old signs still survive in some Manhattan neighborhoods, but, like redwood forests and watermelons with seeds, they are vanishing fast, and once you're aware that they're doomed, the preemptive nostalgia takes hold, and they become as pleasing to the eye as lobster boats.

The idea is that the new ones, which rely on dozens of light-emitting diodes, or LEDs, will last six times longer than the old ones, which relied on two bulbs, and will save two million dollars a year in maintenance and electricity costs. They are also much brighter, and friendlier to immigrants and tourists—you don't have to read English, or read at all, to understand them.

So New York has found another way to look more like Little Rock, Los Angeles, Denver, and New Orleans, which are among the many cities that have adopted the LED signs. This is the way the federal government likes it, apparently. Section 4E.02 of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, published in 2000 by the Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, sets forth the following specifications, among many others, for an acceptable "pedestrian signal indication":

A. A steady WALKING PERSON (symbolizing WALK) signal indication means that a pedestrian facing the signal indication may start to cross the roadway in the direction of the signal indication, possibly in conflict with turning vehicles.

B. A flashing UPRAISED HAND (symbolizing DONT WALK) signal indication means that a pedestrian shall not start to cross the roadway in the direction of the signal indication, but that any pedestrian who has already started to cross on a steady WALKING PERSON (symbolizing WALK) signal indication shall proceed out of the traveled way.

C. A steady UPRAISED HAND (symbolizing DONT WALK) signal indication means that a pedestrian shall not enter the roadway in the direction of the signal indication.

D. A flashing WALKING PERSON (symbolizing WALK) signal indication has no meaning and shall not be used.

Standardization, for all its charms, does have its detractors, among them many children, who sense that there is something patronizing about the hieroglyphs. Last Friday, one of the dissidents, an eight-year-old Upper West Sider named Jacob, who had not stayed up the previous night to watch the Yanks beat the Sox (he prefers the Mets) but who had spent a few moments before bed reading "The Catcher in the Rye," was waiting to cross Fifth Avenue at Ninety-sixth Street, on his way to school. He was with his mother and his younger sister. They waited for the steady walking-person signal indication, then entered the roadway.

"First of all, they're really bright," Jacob said. "They hurt my eyes, even from, like, a block away. They make my eyes water. And, also, the first thing my sister could read was Walk/Don't Walk." The three of them came to a corner: across the street, an upraised hand. They took a look, then crossed anyway. "The old one is just more original," Jacob went on. "Almost every other place has the Man and the Hand. Whenever I go anywhere else, it's the Man and the Hand."

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Italy, France—they always have that. It's un-unique. So I don't really like it. Actually, most of my friends don't like it. Out of the kids in my class, let's say fifteen out of nineteen don't like it. Actually, probably nineteen out of nineteen."

Suddenly, there was one of the old signs—dim and gorgeous. "DONT WALK." Everyone waited for the light to change.

—Nick Paumgarten

DEPT. OF REMEMBERING TWO FROM BERLIN



The Berlin conceptual artists Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock stopped in New York recently to install a show at the Jewish Museum, and while they were here they spent some time at Ground Zero—and took up an old argument about what they'd do at the site to keep memory alive instead of, as Stih says, "memorializing it" or, as Schnock puts it, "shutting the dead away." Stih and Schnock are acute travellers through the thorny semiology of their own city. They didn't enter the competition to design a 9/11 memorial, but their thoughts on memorials are instructive. "Bavarian Quarter," the subject of their Jewish Museum show, consists of eighty silk-screened aluminum signs, banded onto lampposts that wind through an old Berlin Jewish neighborhood, chronicling the accumulation of small proscriptions—against things like owning pets, buying eggs, and using park benches—that slowly and insidiously pushed Berlin's hundred and sixty thousand Jews out of the life, and the mind, of the city. Memorials like that are as intimate as they are powerful, and that's what many New Yorkers want their 9/11 memorial to be.

Listening to Stih and Schnock have an argument about art—"A discussion," Renata says; "Anything Renata wants," says Frieder—is like chaperoning the creative process. This argument began last winter, in the Berlin loft where they brainstorm at the same long table they use for dinner parties, making it hard to know precisely when marital banter meets that process. What you do know, though, is that the argument is serious,

the result of a total, almost consuming collaboration ("We need a wife," Renata says), and not Serious, since they've shopped together, cooked together, and will be doing the dishes together later. Frieder is a lanky, brown-haired Saxon in requisite Berlin black, and Renata is a small, platinum-blond Croatian in requisite Berlin black—except for her shoes, from a collection of exceptionally lurid footwear, which tend to be orange, puce, or iridescent green. The couple are in their forties. The world they inhabit runs the gamut from *Herrprofessordoktoren* to the regulars at their local bar, which caters to disabled transvestites.

Frieder announced at once that he and Renata carry different images of New York City in their heads. "I see the view from the ferry," he said. "All the tall buildings." Renata sees "the narrow streets running between them." Frieder thinks the important thing about the twin towers is that there were two of them, and that this offers him a clue about how to commemorate the people who died in them: "A memorial has to say, 'You are someone. You have someone else in front of you right now. You will not be alone.'" Of course, as Renata said a few days later, at a friend's apartment, it's by no means certain what kind of buildings will go up at Ground Zero, and this makes choosing a memorial for it a fairly blinkered undertaking, at least to two Berlin artists who've been through the Holocaust-memorial wars at home, and whose own "anti-monument" proposal there—a simple bus shelter, with a timetable of buses leaving hourly along the "routes" of Nazi Germany, including the ones to the death camps—was arguably more pertinent than the five acres of jutting stone slabs that the city is getting from the architect Peter Eisenman.

Frieder said, "For me, the memorials are here already, in the victims' homes, in the firehouses, in the stores where you go to buy something and next to the window there's a shrine, with flowers and a photograph."

Renata said, "Frieder, you're talking schmalz! You also need a strong sign, a central sign. That's reality."

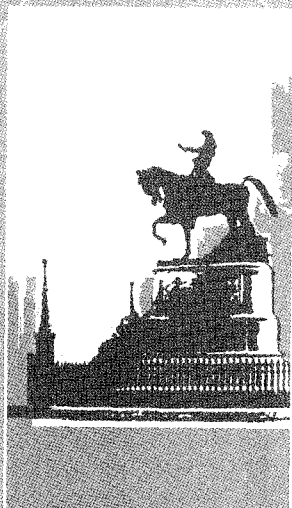
Last winter in Berlin, Stih and Schnock had tossed around the idea of a memorial using the letters "US," for "us" and for "United States"—something to announce that we are an immigrant

country, that the American dream is about "us," all of us, everywhere, maybe even in the US of a world trade center. Now Frieder isn't sure. "Bush said, 'This happened to us.' Unfortunately, he stopped including the rest of world in 9/11." What interests Frieder and Renata is finding a way to commemorate while avoiding the politics of "us and them." They invent outrageous, impossible, complicated gestures. Sending the Statue of Liberty back to France was one—"Suppose they refuse to accept it?" Renata said—or putting her to sea, to wander forever like a Flying Dutchman, or draping her in black, or, for that matter, draping every New York building and monument designed by a foreigner in black. Frieder said, "We thought of asking Christo to wrap the statue, but that's too arty." Renata said, "Maybe you just remove her. See what happens." To which Frieder added, "Then see what happens if you remove the Seagram Building. What would Manhattan look like if it tried to be 'pure' American?"

"You see, Frieder starts plain: he goes from the quiet concept to the shocking," Renata said when they were back in Berlin, picking up the argument on their new speakerphone. "Frieder is more minimalist than I am. I'm the fantasist. I go from shocking to plain." She went on, "There's no recipe. You start from scratch every time." The extraordinary response to their signs and their bus stop has convinced her that a memorial for New York has to involve the same "bumping into yourself" experience. "I see it as people crossing paths, turning a corner, coming across a photograph of someone, or a place to sit and reflect—a place that collects those 'memory stickers' and says, 'Live with me!'" Frieder said, "Right now, you have all those surveillance cameras at the site. There's a way to turn this around. You might include images of people confronting the images of people who died on 9/11. You'd see yourself in the picture. Refractions of connection." It was time to set the table. "I see putting a touch of the Statue of Liberty there, too," Renata told him. "Maybe an arm sticking out. Refractions of aggression. A bit like a graveyard, or maybe more like a chapel, a circle of silence where there's no traffic, a place where, somehow, grief is protected."

—Jane Kramer

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END RUN AT ENRON

Why the country's most notorious executives may never face criminal charges.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

In the recent era of corporate scandals, Enron remains the archetype. Toward the end of 2001, in little more than a month, the Houston energy trader went from being the seventh-ranked company on the Fortune 500 to a bankrupt shell. In response, the federal government launched what may be its most intensive white-collar criminal investigation. Among the principal targets were the leaders of Enron, including the for-

mer chairman, Kenneth L. Lay, and the former chief executive, Jeffrey K. Skilling. Ten thousand of their subordinates lost their jobs, along with an estimated \$1.2 billion in retirement savings, yet in the last year of Enron's existence Lay cashed in about a hundred million dollars in company stock, and Skilling sold sixty-seven million dollars in Enron shares. At least, it seemed at the time, the criminal-justice system might seek its own ac-

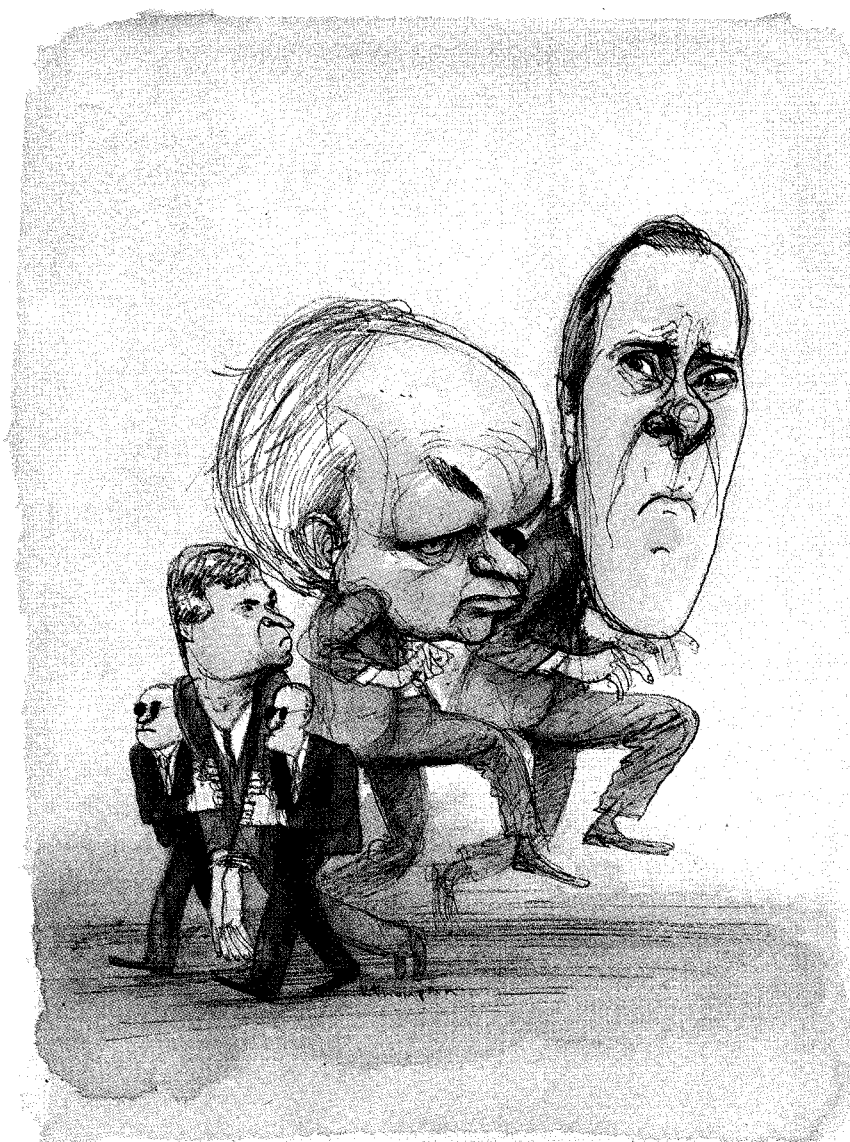
counting from Lay and Skilling. The criminal investigation of the company has achieved some notable successes, including guilty pleas from two senior executives—one of whom has already gone to prison. Prosecutors are far from wrapping up their inquiries. Today, though, almost two years after the fall of Enron, it appears increasingly likely that Lay and Skilling will never face criminal charges.

Through Enron's spectacular rise and fall, Lay and Skilling, the company's Mr. Outside and Mr. Inside, served as symbols of the company. The balding and genial Lay, who is now sixty-one years old, acted as the company's public face. He cultivated politicians, especially the Bush family; he was one of the largest individual financial contributors to George W. Bush's political career, largesse that earned him the nickname Kenny Boy from the President. Skilling, now forty-nine years old, was the cerebral architect of Enron's business strategy. A former management consultant with McKinsey, Skilling transformed Enron from a sleepy pipeline operation to a futuristic trading enterprise—a company that could, in theory, someday own nothing except the ability to broker most of the world's energy transactions. Both men fostered a highly macho culture at Enron, a place where off-road car rallies served as corporate retreats and where arrogance slipped easily into hubris.

Since the fall of Enron, the company's leaders—"Ken Lay and the boys," as Howard Dean puts it in his stump speech—have become symbols of corporate greed and malfeasance. But criminal cases are not built on symbolism. And, as the facts of the case have become clearer, so have the reasons that Lay and Skilling have eluded prosecution: the complexity of the corporate enterprise they built; the overlapping and sometimes competing investigations of the company; and the reluctance of witnesses to come forward. Mostly, though, the Enron investigation has been a demonstration of the limits of criminal law.

On September 10th, prosecutors from the Justice Department's Enron task force appeared in federal court in Houston with their biggest trophy to date: Ben F. Glisan, Jr., the former corporate treasurer of Enron. Glisan was in his

RICHARD THOMPSON



Former C.F.O. Andrew Fastow has been indicted; Ken Lay and Jeffrey Skilling have not.

mid-thirties when he got the job. Now, at thirty-seven, he stood before Judge Kenneth M. Hoyt to plead guilty to conspiracy to commit wire and securities fraud. The Judge asked Andrew Weissmann, the deputy head of the task force, to outline the nature of Glisan's crime, and Weissmann read a statement that had been negotiated with Glisan's lawyers.

The case concerned the issue at the heart of Enron's collapse—the company's use of off-the-books partnerships, which are known as “special purpose entities.” Like many companies, Enron felt compelled to show ever more impressive results to Wall Street analysts, and its executives turned to accounting tricks to make the company look more successful than it really was. Enron's gimmick was to remove troubled investments from its balance sheet and place them under the auspices of nominally independent partnerships, which were in fact run by a handful of Enron insiders—in particular, Andrew Fastow, the chief financial officer. Those insiders could make big profits: Glisan, for example, invested \$5,826 in one special-purpose entity, and received \$1,040,744 in return. The most notable of the partnerships were known under the rubric LJM, named by Fastow in homage to his family, using the initials of the first names of his wife, Lea, and their two children. But the idea behind many of the largest partnerships was inherently unstable. Many of them were financed with securities based on Enron stock, meaning that they could stay afloat only as long as Enron kept doing well itself. Once the stock price started to fall precipitously, beginning in 2001, the chain of events that led to Enron's collapse was set in motion.

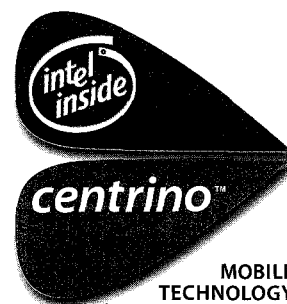
Glisan pleaded guilty to conspiring “to manipulate artificially Enron's financial statements” through the use of one of the partnerships. As part of his arrangement with the government, Glisan agreed to forfeit some of his profits and to receive a five-year sentence, which would begin that very day—by the standards of white-collar crime, a harsh punishment. It made Glisan the first and so far only Enron executive to go to prison. Glisan's guilty plea was important for another reason: unlike many courthouses, the facility in Houston does not have an underground loading dock for prisoners, so just a few minutes after Glisan's guilty

plea photographers captured his first shuffling steps into a prison van. His tie was removed and his ankles were shackled, and his suit jacket was folded over his wrists in a forlorn attempt to cover his handcuffs. Prosecutors could not have designed a more humbling tableau.

And yet there was something less to Glisan's plea than met the eye. For instance, he did not agree to cooperate with investigators. “We have witnesses, and Mr. Glisan is not currently one of them,” Leslie Caldwell, the head of the Enron task force, told reporters. “He was never cooperating, and we never expected him to cooperate.” Glisan's plea thus brought the government no closer to making a case against Lay, Skilling, or even Fastow, his former boss. Glisan had taken the unusual step of pleading guilty without cooperating because, according to people familiar with the negotiations, he wanted to put the matter behind him as quickly as possible. Prosecutors, in turn, agreed to the deal because they didn't fully trust Glisan; they didn't want his cooperation. The guilty plea and the swift sentence offered something to both sides—an immediate resolution for Glisan and a prominent scalp for prosecutors.

Whether the targets are drug dealers or corporate leaders, prosecutors operate by certain immutable, if unwritten, rules: for instance, a simple case is better than a complex one, and cases should always be built from the bottom up; a case against the leader of any organization is always based on the cooperation of his subordinates. Prosecutors prefer to bring cases based on clear and comprehensible personal misconduct—such as lying, cheating, or stealing—rather than on more complicated kinds of misdeeds, like willful blindness or collective negligence. If the task force was going to make a case against Skilling and Lay, it would have to be one that prosecutors could easily explain. And they would have to persuade subordinates of the two executives to cooperate.

From the beginning, it was evident that none of this would be easy. As prosecutors and F.B.I. agents dug into thousands of boxes of Enron documents, they were bewildered by the labyrinth they found. In particular, the structure and control of the special-purpose entities were extremely convoluted, and varied from deal to deal. Enron's investments ranged



Carry on.

from gas pipelines in Florida to power plants in India to electricity-producing barges off the coast of Nigeria. "Every other white-collar case in history is arithmetic," one investigator said. "Enron is calculus." More troubling, from the prosecutors' perspective, was that lawyers and accountants had helped to create the partnerships, which gave the beneficiaries of these arrangements a potentially formidable defense. "This is how we go about investigating these cases," the investigator said. "First, we have to explain it to ourselves, so that we know what was going on. Then we have to figure out if it's illegal. Then we have to figure out how to persuade a jury that it's illegal. And then we have to figure out how to explain why it's illegal even though the accountants and the lawyers said it was O.K."

Rather than work from the bottom, prosecutors started from the side—that is, with Enron's accountants. In the company's last days, before it declared bankruptcy, there were widespread reports of document shredding, not just at Enron but also at the once admired accounting firm of Arthur Andersen. Enron was Andersen's biggest client in the United States, and was a huge source of business for both consulting and accounting services. Andersen auditors had approved many of the company's most dubious financial arrangements, including some of the partnerships, but prosecutors were wary

of explaining such issues to a jury. Instead, the task force decided that in its first case prosecutors would merely attempt to prove that Andersen had obstructed justice by shredding documents. According to the investigator, "We made Andersen our first case because it was easy and it was obvious." It turned out to be neither.

Prosecutors already regarded Andersen as a repeat offender. In the few years before the scandal broke, the firm had entered into civil settlements in two major cases in which it had been accused of negligence and misconduct; each time, Andersen had paid heavy fines and promised that it had changed its ways. When the Enron investigation began, several top Andersen partners went to the Justice Department, in Washington, and implored Michael Chertoff, then the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the criminal division and the lead negotiator for the government, to press civil, not criminal, charges against the firm. But in March of 2002 Chertoff and his subordinates, frustrated by Andersen's failure once again to admit wrongdoing, pushed through a criminal indictment charging the firm with obstruction of justice.

The theory of the case—shredding documents—may have been simple, but the defendant was not. The government rarely brings criminal cases against organizations, because jurors often have a difficult time understanding how a com-

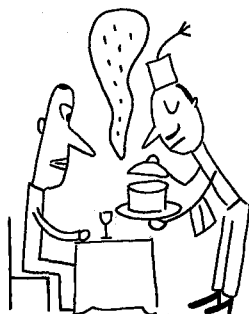
pany or a partnership, as opposed to a human being, can commit a crime. Even after David Duncan, the lead Andersen auditor on the Enron account, pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice, the trial of the firm turned out to be arduous for the government lawyers. "They let themselves believe that Andersen was demonic," Rusty Hardin, the Houston lawyer who defended Andersen at trial, told me. "They thought everyone would give in, that they would cooperate against Enron." Not only did witnesses from Arthur Andersen refuse to implicate Enron, they defended their own conduct as well.

In the end, on June 15, 2002, after four weeks of testimony and ten days of deliberation, the jury did convict Andersen of the single count against it, driving the eighty-nine-year-old firm out of business. The Enron task force was criticized about the Andersen case from several vantage points. Some said that the case reflected excessive zeal, because the implosion of Arthur Andersen cost the jobs of thousands of employees, most of whom had nothing to do with Enron or with any other scandal. Others questioned the prosecutors' competence in almost losing what had looked like an easy case. After that, chastened prosecutors narrowed their focus to traditional kinds of criminal misconduct and turned their attention back to Enron.

"For all the complexity of the securities laws and all the criminal activity that falls within the securities laws, prosecutors always look at how juries will see cases," Daniel Richman, a former federal prosecutor who is now a professor at Fordham Law School, said. "A jury is a group of people who may not be so quick to convict for activity that can be explained away as the product of complicated accounting rules that reasonable people can differ on. What prosecutors correctly assume carries a lot more weight with a jury is personal enrichment by the people who later may claim that the accounting rules are too complicated to explain." Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling may have supervised the company as a whole, but it appears that they did not invest in, or directly profit from, the questionable off-the-books partnerships. Andrew Fastow, the chief financial officer, did—and thus became the major focus of the government's investigation.



Fastow was a natural target. He and his family had made millions from the off-the-books partnerships, lending an aspect of excessive greed to a case against him. As prosecutors untangled the structure of the partnerships, they came to believe that many of Fastow's profits—more than thirty million dollars—came as a result of fraud and rigged deals. But what made the case against Fastow especially appealing was his potential as a star witness: Fastow, who had worked so closely with Lay and Skilling, might be able to reveal whether they had authorized illegal activities at Enron. So prosecutors, it seems, tried to find the leverage to get him to plead guilty and testify about his superiors.



They started with Fastow's right-hand man, Michael Kopper, who helped design and run many of the problematic off-the-books partnerships. As Fastow's close ally, Kopper had shared in the partnership rewards, netting twelve million dollars from the schemes. On August 21, 2002, Kopper made a deal, pleading guilty to two counts of conspiracy, forfeiting his financial gains, and agreeing to testify against his boss and others. (He will be sentenced after his cooperation is completed.) Kopper's plea remains the most important government victory in the Enron case to date, but it didn't prompt Fastow to budge.

In an especially tough move, the Enron task force then threatened to indict Fastow's wife, Lea, an M.B.A. who had worked at Enron from 1991 to 1997. According to the government, she and her husband not only secretly participated in some of the partnership schemes but failed to report the income on their tax returns. A person familiar with the case told me that prosecutors offered to forgo an indictment of Lea Fastow if Andrew Fastow would plead guilty and cooperate, and that, moreover, if Fastow forced the government to take him to trial they would ask for a sentence on the order of twenty-five to thirty years. Fastow, however, refused a bargain, and on April 30, 2003, Lea was charged with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, one count of money-laundering conspiracy, and four counts of filing false tax returns. "In Prosecution

101, Fastow should have cooperated a long time ago," the investigator said. "But he hasn't."

Prosecutors faced a dilemma. As Fastow's attorney, John Keker, said on the day that his client was charged, "Enron hired Andy to arrange off-balance-sheet financing. Enron's board of directors, its C.E.O., and its chairman directed and praised his work. Accountants and law-

yers reviewed and approved his work. . . . He never believed he was committing any crime." If Fastow was going to argue that his actions were approved by his superiors at Enron, how was the government to respond? According to the indictment of Fastow, the government would assert that the chief

financial officer had "made various false representations to Enron's Board to obtain its approval for Fastow's participation in LJM." Fastow and his confederates "violated their duty to provide honest services to Enron," the indictment went on, and he "violated his representation to the Board that he would not personally profit from any appreciation in the value of Enron shares held by LJM." In other words, according to the government, the members of the Enron board of directors—including Lay and Skilling—were Fastow's victims. This, no doubt, is what Lay and Skilling wanted all along. "We read the indictments with great joy," Bruce Hiler, who is Skilling's attorney, told me.

With a case built around Fastow, the only hope was that he might eventually turn on Lay and Skilling. A swift trial (and conviction) might have nudged Fastow to change sides. But the judge in the case, Kenneth Hoyt, has moved it along at a leisurely pace.

One of the few African-Americans appointed to the federal bench by President Reagan, Hoyt has a reputation for eccentricity. In a 1997 case involving alleged environmental contamination in a largely minority neighborhood, the Judge asserted that physical differences among races were the product of their environments. "Why do you think Chinese people are short?" Hoyt told the lawyers in the case. "Because there is so much damn wind over there they need to be short. Why are they so tall in Africa? Be-



(And on, and on,
and on, and on...)



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cause they need to be tall. It's environmental. I mean, you don't jump up and get a banana off a tree if you're only four feet. If you're seven feet tall and you're standing in China, then you're going to get blown away when that Siberian wind comes through." The court of appeals in that case called Hoyt's remarks "unfortunate, grossly inappropriate, and deserving of close and careful scrutiny."

Though Fastow was indicted in October of 2002, the Judge set a trial date of April 20, 2004. (Lea Fastow's trial was originally scheduled for January 27, 2004, but it was moved back two weeks, to avoid a conflict with the Super Bowl, which is to take place in Houston on February 1st.) Several people familiar with the proceedings believe that Andrew Fastow's trial may well slip into the fall of 2004, a schedule that has generated little pressure for him to make a deal with prosecutors.

This lack of urgency has infected the whole case. Leslie Caldwell and her colleagues on the task force have impeccable reputations as skilled, apolitical prosecutors. While the Enron task force has added to its staff, there have been major changes at the Department of Justice. Michael Chertoff, as Assistant Attorney General for the criminal division, closely supervised and pushed forward the early Enron cases, and especially the Andersen prosecution. But earlier this year Chertoff left the Administration to become a federal appeals-court judge. On January 10, 2002, just as the Enron scandal was breaking, Attorney General John Ashcroft recused himself from the case because he had received campaign contributions from the company. He left the oversight to the Deputy Attorney General, Larry Thompson, but Thompson, too, left the government this year and has not yet been replaced. "You have a very good group of people still on this case," one person familiar with the investigation said. "But you still do need a push from the top, because attention spans change. You need the people who are running the divisions to express real interest. That motivates the F.B.I. That motivates everyone. And that's not there right now."

The investigation itself remains extremely difficult. In addition to the complexity of the Enron story, prosecutors in the Justice Department face the daunt-

THE HUNKERING

In October the red leaves going brown heap and scatter
over hayfield and dirt road, over garden and circular driveway,

and rise in a curl of wind dishevelled as schoolchildren
at recess, school just starting and summer done, winter's

white quiet beginning in ice on the windshield, in hard frost
that only blue asters survive, and in the long houses that once

more tighten themselves for darkness and hunker down.

—Donald Hall

ing problem of several competing lawsuits and inquiries. Among those who have pursued litigation or separate investigations of the company are the Securities and Exchange Commission, an outside investigator appointed by the bankruptcy court, the Department of Labor, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the state of California. All of these investigations could lead to interviews with many of the same witnesses, and examinations of many of the same documents. There are dozens of private civil lawsuits, too, among them a class-action suit by Enron shareholders to win damages for the collapse of the stock. The result has been a great reluctance on the part of most witnesses to cooperate with anyone, but especially with the criminal prosecutors. "People want to keep their heads down," the investigator said. "Some people are not talking because it's their lawyers' fifteen minutes of fame. And the fact that people at Enron made hundreds of millions of dollars out there means that they all can afford lawyers." The most recent report by the bankruptcy examiner, an Atlanta attorney named Neal Batson, noted that twenty-two people connected with the case had pleaded the Fifth Amendment and refused to be interviewed, among them Lay, Fastow, and Kopper.

The Enron task force has made steady progress against mid-level players. Twenty-five people are awaiting trial. On September 17th, three former executives at Merrill Lynch were charged with orchestrating a fraud with Enron regard-

ing the sale, in 1999, of its interests in the energy-producing barges off the Nigerian coast. Merrill Lynch has agreed to a measure of outside supervision, under the direction of the Justice Department, to insure that it does not become party to this kind of misconduct again.

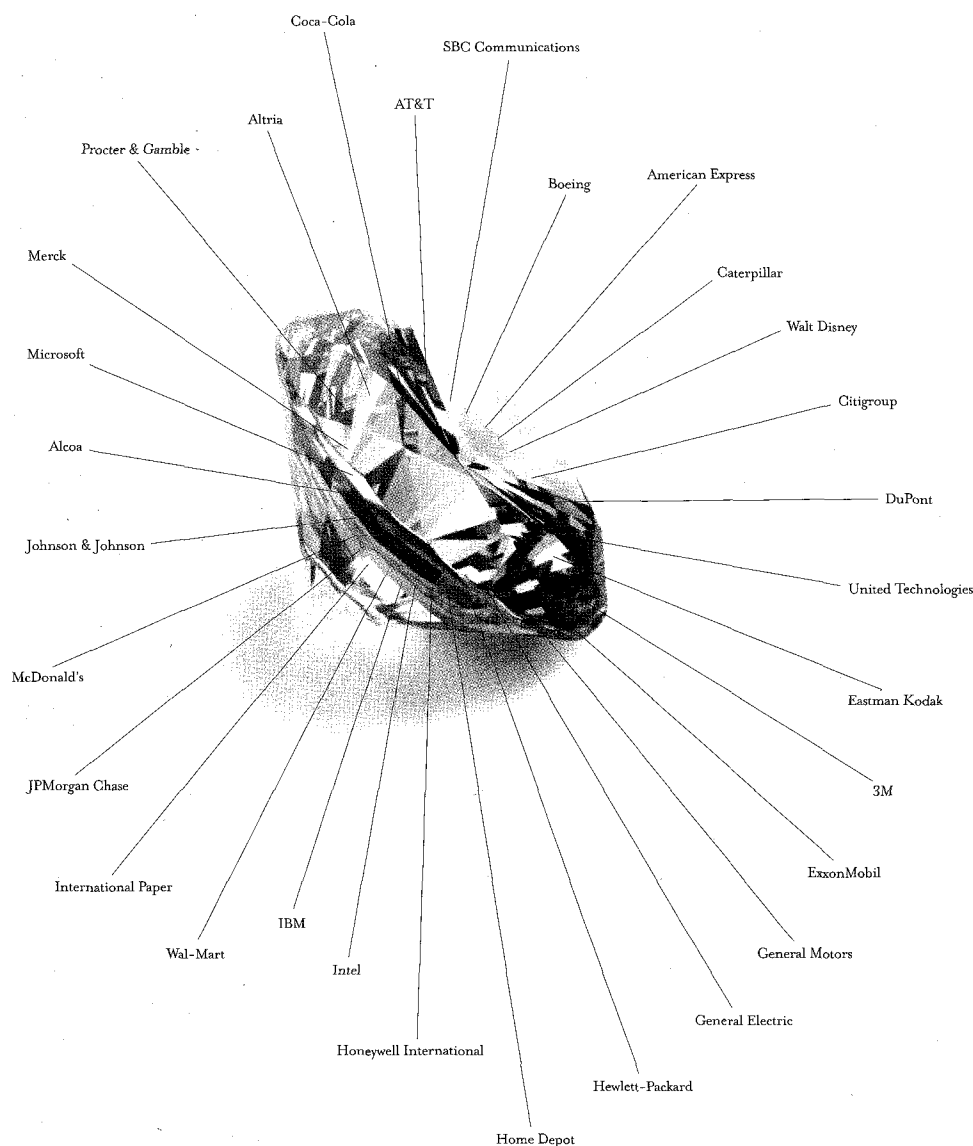
Ultimately, the question for the task force is: Can a criminal case be made against Lay and Skilling? Did either man engage in unlawful insider trading? Lay, in particular, was criticized for touting Enron stock to company employees at the same time that he was selling vast quantities of it. But, as always with Enron, the story of Lay's stock sales is more complicated than it appears.

Lay used much of his Enron stock as collateral against bank and brokerage loans for other investments. In 2001, as Enron began to collapse, the conditions of these loans obligated him to sell company stock—almost a hundred million dollars' worth—to repay the loans. Indeed, as Kurt Eichenwald reported in a February, 2003, story in the *Times*, Lay took a variety of steps in 2001 to hold on to a considerable amount of stock, even when it would have been to his financial advantage to sell. Lay's management of his portfolio turned a stake of \$339 million in marketable investments into \$3.8 million; his retirement benefits fell from \$68 million to \$2 million. Lay and his wife, Linda, still own real estate worth millions of dollars, but there may be some truth in Linda's tearful, much mocked claim, on the "Today" show in January, 2002, "We are fighting for liquidity." If Lay was an insider trader, he was an inept one.

An insider-trading case against Skil-

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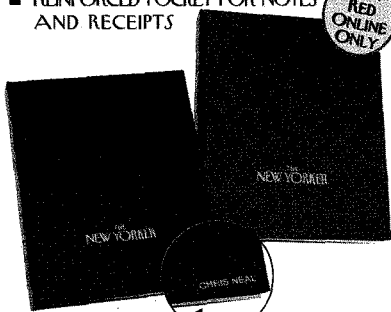
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ling could have similar weaknesses. Starting in the fall of 2000, according to his attorneys, he made regular sales of stock under an S.E.C. program designed to allow company insiders to cash in portions of their holdings. (In Skilling's case, he sold about sixty-seven million dollars' worth of Enron stock.) Then, in June, 2001, two months before he resigned, Skilling stopped. "He terminated the plan and stopped selling, because he thought the stock was undervalued," Hiler, his lawyer, said. "If you know something bad is about to happen to the company, you certainly don't stop selling." That's not a complete defense; insider traders need not sell all their holdings, especially if they know the company is about to collapse. But, because Enron stock collapsed in late 2001, Skilling's decision seems to have cost him tens of millions of dollars.

A more substantive claim against the two men may be that they approved Fastow's off-the-books deals so that they could deceive investors and cover up the company's disastrous course. Investigators concede that this will be an especially tough case to make against Lay. For most of the period under investigation, Lay appears to have paid little attention to the operating details of the company. As Enron's chairman, he seemed more focussed on Enron's external relations, like the naming of the Houston Astros' ballpark as Enron Field. "If they are going to impute criminal conduct on the basis of the approval of the LJMs and the like, they would have to differentiate Ken's conduct from that of other members of the board," one person familiar with Lay's defense told me. "Unless they can show that Ken was more intimately involved, I think they have a problem." Enron investigators have reluctantly come to share this assessment.

On the surface, Skilling may make a more appealing target for charges of cooking Enron's books. He was a hands-on manager until his sudden resignation, in August, 2001, shortly before the company's collapse. To investigators' chagrin, Skilling rarely used e-mail, which has become the favored evidence in white-collar crime. Skilling certainly knew about Fastow's partnerships, but there may be some credence to the view that Fastow, at least to some extent, schemed behind his

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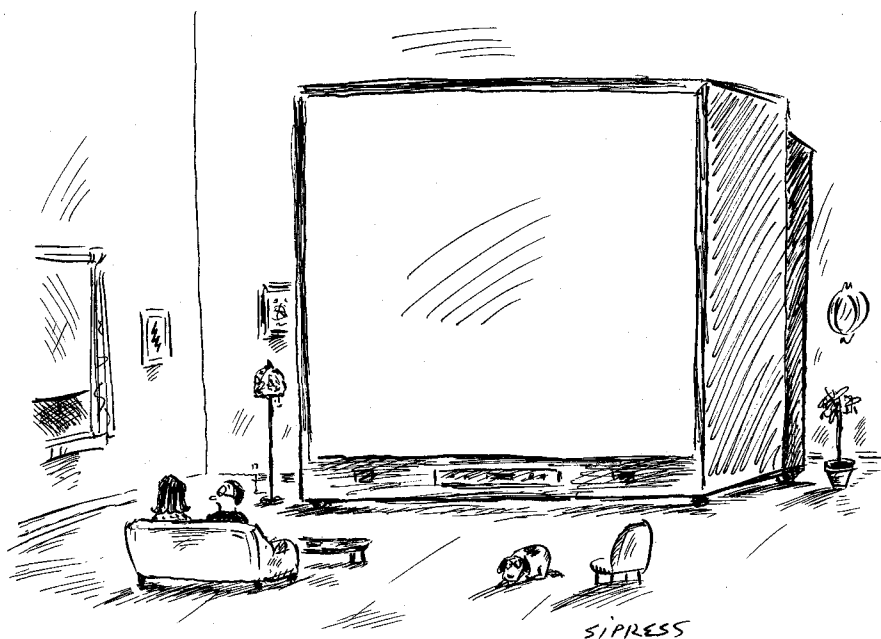
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and more

**AND: A calendar of New Yorker
events across the country**



"I don't know, honey. What do you feel like doing?"

bosses' backs. On January 16, 2001, for instance, Jordan Mintz, an in-house Enron lawyer who reported to Fastow, said in an e-mail to a colleague that Fastow "believes (perhaps rightly so) that Skilling will shut down LJM if he knew how much Andy earned" in one of the transactions.

Skilling may well have known about much of the financial legerdemain that led to Enron's implosion. He was a principal backer of one of Enron's most posterous failures, a broadband video-on-demand service. Even though the project never generated more than a few thousand dollars in revenue, Skilling valued the business in the billions of dollars. Many executives, not only at Enron, were overvaluing broadband properties in the dot-com era, but the collapse of the company, plus Skilling's stock sales, raises questions about criminal misconduct.

Skilling's most useful defense, when it comes to criminal prosecution, may be that many people at Enron knew of the company's deceptions. As Batson, the bankruptcy examiner, noted in his most recent report, which was filed earlier this year, "The transactions at issue were complex and massive, and large groups of officers and employees, representing such diverse functions as finance, accounting, tax, and legal, were assembled to com-

plete them." Enron's corporate culture of deceit amounted to an in-house joke, as captured by a song, "Balance Sheet Blues," which circulated within the company in 1998: "They call us 'innovators' / We got to please the raters / Don't feed us to the 'gators / We got the balance sheet blues." As the bankruptcy examiner observed, "While plainly satirical, this song reflects an appreciation of key factors that ultimately contributed to Enron's demise: excessive leverage, a voracious appetite for cash and reliance on inadequately disclosed financial transactions . . . to 'please' the rating agencies."

In the end, prosecutors may be able to show only that Lay and Skilling presided over a culture where this kind of pervasive dishonesty flourished—which is not, in any legal sense, a crime. As the Enron investigators are coming to acknowledge, it may not be possible to divide up the systemic corruption within the company into easily understood portions of wrongdoing that can be served up to a jury of ordinary people. All the people at Enron who played parts in these transactions pushed the company a little closer to ruin, and all of them could claim that they were only small cogs in a big machine. The sad truth of the criminal-justice system is that when everyone is guilty, no one is. ♦

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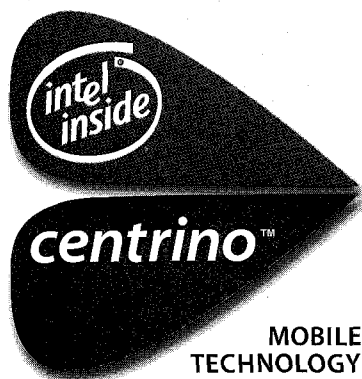


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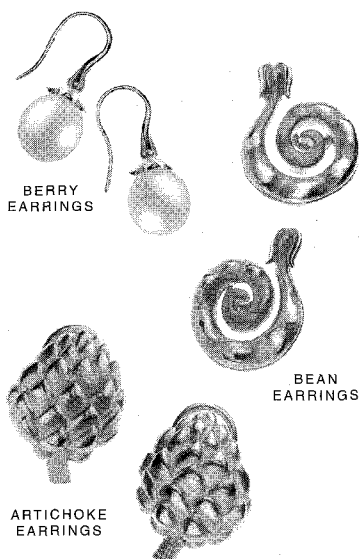
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EVERLASTING

BY IAN FRAZIER

The shock our family experienced at the death of our beloved Uncle Simon is beyond my power to describe. You feel so helpless, so bereft. . . . For months afterward we stumbled around in a fog of numbed incomprehension. But then grief naturally began to turn to anger. How could something like this have happened? Simon was a strong, healthy man of ninety-seven years. He had never been sick a single day or suffered any serious injury. In my mind, that profile sent up a red flag right away. Here's a man who has lived without any health problems at all for nearly a hundred years, and suddenly one morning, out of the blue, he dies. Obviously, the facts point to hidden negligence or other underlying causes.

A few of our acquaintances—no one close to us, of course—whispered that Simon had brought his death on himself by being "old." That blame-the-victim approach is hardly worth responding to, except to say that "old" is a relative term, and reducing anybody's life to a number seems inaccurate and unfair. One or two other people have been insensitive enough to inform us, witlessly, that "we all have to go sometime." As if such platitudes spoke to our sorrow and outrage! Yes, many human beings do "go" after a certain number of years. But do we have to? By no means. In Simon's case, there wasn't

a reason in the world for this man to die. Simon's blood pressure was at exactly the level posted on the A.M.A.'s Web site, and when they lowered the recommendation not long ago Simon's pressure, amazingly, went down just enough to meet it. His heartbeat, circulation, kidney and liver function, lungs, motility—all the indicators were right

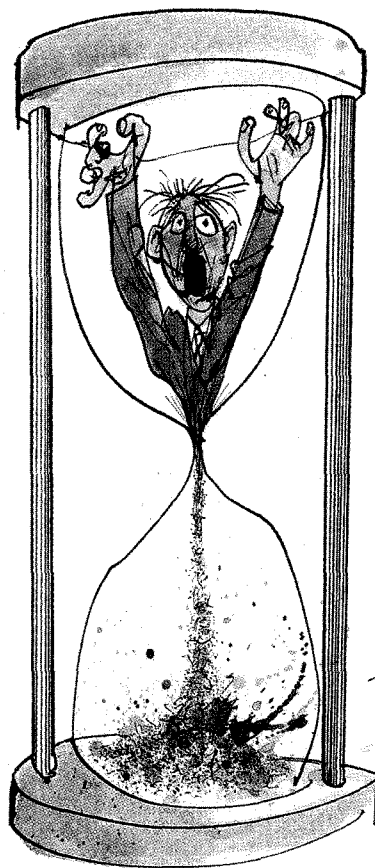
where they should be for a perfectly functioning metabolism.

And when it came to the life-enhancing qualities of attitude and involvement Uncle Simon was simply off the charts. He was the sweetest, kindest, most thoughtful, generous, wonderful man. Anyplace he went, he lit it up with his spirit. If you saw the pleasure he took just from his clay class . . . What possible purpose could have been served by the death of such a man? Now we understand, in human terms, what it means to be a throwaway society.

Uncle Simon used to tell the most marvellous stories. He

was in the merchant marine and his family owned one of the first television sets in Canton, Ohio. We would listen to him by the hour, but unfortunately none of us ever thought to sit down with him in front of a tape recorder and preserve his stories for the future. Now we never will. What's especially hard about his death is that it's so final.

Simon's children, who were more in-



RAIPH STEADMAN

volved than anyone else in his health maintenance, feel that modern science is to blame. They believe that it largely ignores people in Simon's situation and, instead of helping, hides behind statistics and actuarial tables. These, however, when examined more closely, reveal a picture that is strikingly different from what we've all been told. It's true that most people in our country die in their seventies and eighties. Surprisingly, though, far fewer of them die in their early hundreds; or, to put it another way, people who approach that more advanced age are actually *less* likely to die. These hardy folks have survived the most perilous of life's passages, and are stronger for it, and usually are geared up and ready to live on and on. An enlightened science responsive to their needs would provide them with the appropriate medicines and technological tools, instead of devoting most of its resources to fields like cosmetic-surgery research, which it does because (quite frankly) that's where the money is.

Behind this administrative failing is an even bigger one—a failing of human imagination. Nowhere is it engraved in stone that a person's life must last for only so long. The Bible's dreary statement that a life span is "three-score years and ten" and its tired talk about times to be born and times to die now smell strongly of plain old defeatism. Determined individuals like Noah and Dick Clark have shown that people can live indefinitely beyond what is thought of as normal chronology. The members of the rock group Aerosmith, by suspending their pulse rate and similar techniques, have managed to survive and remain a touring band since the days of the French and Indian War. They provide a goal that the rest of us can work toward.

In simplest terms, it's only common sense: if we're still living, why stop? And yet for centuries we've accepted the myth of life as a "natural" cycle, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, conveniently overlooking our own responsibility in it. Were Simon here, I'm sure he would agree. He did all that could be expected in order to remain on the planet, but a shortsighted, too-little-too-late public policy on this subject sadly let him down.

For my part, I plan to keep on looking

into larger systemic problems that could have contributed somehow to my uncle's death. Even more, I intend to make sure that what happened to him doesn't happen to me. Preparation will be the key, so I've begun by taking a personal health inventory. I am sixty-three years old, not that it matters, and I could lose sixty or eighty pounds, though I'm comfortable at my present weight. Other than that, I'm in excellent shape. I do have a mild case of gynecomastia, some anal seepage, and hip, knee, and bladder problems, with substantial loss of hearing, sight, and sense of smell. Those aside, I'm just the same, physically, as I was at twenty-five.

And mentally I'm even younger. I refuse to be categorized as "senior" in what I think or do. I keep up with popular culture and pay attention to (and wear) the latest young-adult styles. I never miss a new movie aimed at the youth market, and though adult critics may decry such movies, I enjoy them, and admire their vitality. I'm careful to maintain a youthful outlook even in the language I use; for example, I avoid the word "aging," because of its negative connotation. I prefer to think that as years go by a person isn't aging but continuing. I plan to continue for a very long time.

In an absolute worst-case scenario, forty years from now I and all the rest of us sixty-somethings will be gone. This dire prediction for the future is of course only one of many, and may or may not come to pass. It should make us stop and think, however. If it did happen, it would represent a serious disruption in the way we live now. To understand it better, imagine the sun coming up exactly as it did this morning; the year, however, is 2043, and you are not there, anywhere on earth, to see it, and neither is anyone you went to school with, knew from work, or used to run into around town. The prospect is deeply unsettling, and should motivate everybody to action. Those at risk should start making phone calls, firing off e-mails, and contacting congressional representatives. The oncoming threat can be averted with proper use of technology and sufficient funding, but efforts must begin soon if they are to succeed. As we've learned, to our sorrow, not enough will be done unless we push as hard as we can. ♦

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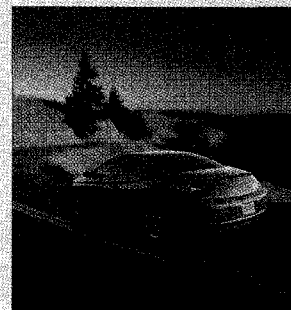
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MOTHER OF INVENTION

Elsa Schiaparelli's seminal clothes are on display in Philadelphia.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

Elsa Schiaparelli's signature color was a violent magenta that she admired, she said, because it was "life-giving, like all the light and the birds and the fish in the world put together, a color of China and Peru but not of the West." She called it "Shocking." In French lingerie shops, it is still referred to as *le shocking*, and Yves Saint Laurent

dearment. "Her particular charm?" he writes: "Her brutality, her arrogance, her self-possession, disdain, storms of anger, odd whims, her Gorgon's mask." She was a majestic thunderhead whose bolts crackled unpredictably. The electric theme recurs in the title of Schiaparelli's autobiography, "Shocking Life," published in 1954, and in the name of her

fashion houses in the first decades of the last century like two rockets with equal payloads of ambition. Chanel settled into the lower and brighter—more visible—orbit, which the gravity of convention has begun to erode. Schiaparelli exerts her influence like a distant celestial body on women and designers who may see hot pink when they free-associate her name, but who otherwise have no precise image of her work. Beautiful, low-born Chanel, the daughter of a peddler and the mistress of a duke (Schiaparelli, splitting the difference, referred to her as "that dreary little bourgeoisie"), was, of necessity, a great student both of class and of men, and she became a master of the irreproachable, distilling a notion of lithe simplic-



Schiaparelli photographed by Lee Miller at her home in Paris in 1945; an evening coat in Schiaparelli's 1939 spring collection.

describes it in his foreword to Palmer White's knowledgeable 1986 biography ("Elsa Schiaparelli: Empress of Paris Fashion") as a pink with "the nerve of red . . . an aggressive, brawling, warrior pink." Saint Laurent characterizes the woman herself—whom he dressed, revered, and borrowed from extensively—in even more harrowing terms of en-

most famous perfume, also Shocking, first marketed in 1937. But what is most shocking about Schiaparelli in 2003 is her obscurity.

History tends to remember those who have one big idea—monotheism, penicillin, the little black dress—rather than a host of good ones. Coco Chanel and Elsa Schiaparelli launched their

ity that was radical for its time into an enduringly desirable modern uniform. Homely, aristocratic Schiaparelli—"that Italian artist who makes clothes," as Chanel called her—was abandoned by her only mate and never cohabited with another. But the possession of an impeccable social pedigree combined with a passionate allegiance to the avant-

garde inured her to reproach—or perhaps whetted her appetite for it. She was a poet of couture rather than a prose stylist like Chanel. She designed clothes for an emboldened and un beholden New Woman. And she probably did more to enrich the language of twentieth-century dress than any of her peers.

A mammoth retrospective of Schiaparelli's couture that runs until early January at the Philadelphia Museum of Art charts the topography of a legendary and protean, though submerged, career: fashion's Atlantis. (The show is amplified by the curator Delys E. Blum's excellent companion volume, "Shocking! The Art and Fashion of Elsa Schiaparelli"; Yale; \$65.) Excluding, for the moment, Schiaparelli's collaboration with the Dada movement and the Surrealists, in which art and fashion were equal partners in a fertile if kinky celebrity marriage, the roster of her innovations includes items now so commonplace and indispensable that it is easy to forget how much prescience they represent.

There is nothing in the graphic knitwear from Schiaparelli's first collections (1927-29)—a sailor's midgy with a trompe-l'oeil bow; a sleeveless tank with a motif of tropical fish; daringly cut, one- and two-piece woollen bathing suits with stylized nautical emblems (including a seaman's tattoo)—that would date them if they suddenly appeared in a show by some edgy young Italian like Antonio Marras. Helmut Lang's flapper dress of last year, composed entirely of zippers, seemed cheeky and fresh, but Schiaparelli rakishly scarred her evening gowns with plastic "lightning closures" in 1935. Diane von Furstenberg is often given credit for the wraparound dress, with which she launched her career in the early seventies. But Schiaparelli showed its prototype in 1930—the same year she introduced mix-and-match separates, and engineered a backless swimsuit (to promote a tan without strap marks) whose built-in bra received a U.S. patent. Months later, she provoked the outrage of the British press by appearing in London, on a buying trip for tweeds, in a pair of svelte culottes cropped at the calf, and by dressing the tennis champion Lili de Alvarez in a short, divided skirt of white silk that, like the culottes, brazenly proclaimed

that women—even ladies—have two thighs with a space between them. Followers of fashion also owe Schiaparelli the wedge, the jumpsuit, the overall, paper clothes, transparent raincoats, folding eyeglasses, fun furs, the scarf dress, colored hosiery, athletic wear, the shirtwaist jacket, ethnic-themed collections (one of Saint Laurent's many debts to his Gorgon), and the ready-to-wear boutique. Designers are apparently still mining her archives: a suit from Schiaparelli's 1933 winter collection, in a bias-cut, navy-and-white tweed jersey, with a wrapped jacket belted slightly above the natural waistline, looks uncannily like recent Prada.

It must be said of lists like the above that there are rarely any pure "firsts" in fashion, and Schiaparelli was herself indebted to predecessors, most notably Paul Poiret. It must also be said that not every Schiaparelli was a masterpiece. In a photograph by Hoyningen-Huene published in *Vogue* in November, 1933, the dumpy, middle-aged couturier appears to be modelling a bedspread and matching pillow sham, though Blum informs us that her outfit is a taffeta dinner suit and cape in a quilted fabric called "Armada." But the authority of Schiaparelli's talent and her character was such that she could subvert convention, redefine beauty, and impose an aggressive silhouette, a goofy print (white rabbits riding bicycles), or a funky synthetic (she made garments of "Rhodophane," latex, "Jersela," oilskin, "angel hair," and "tree bark" rayon, as well as of straw, horsehair, mattress ticking, and sackcloth) on a timorous public. "Twenty percent of women have inferiority complexes and seventy have illusions," she declared with the impunity of a Pygmalion in her oracular "Twelve Commandments." Though one cannot accurately say that she single-handedly corralled women into pants, the lean swank of the trousers that she proposed in the mid-thirties went far to sanction their acceptance by the herd leaders of chic. One also can't say that she invented shoulder pads, because couturiers before her—and, of course, men's tailors—had employed them correctively. But Schiaparelli was the architect of the power suit, and of what contemporary fashion journalists called "hard chic," and she styled the racy swagger of the stars who embodied it: Dietrich,

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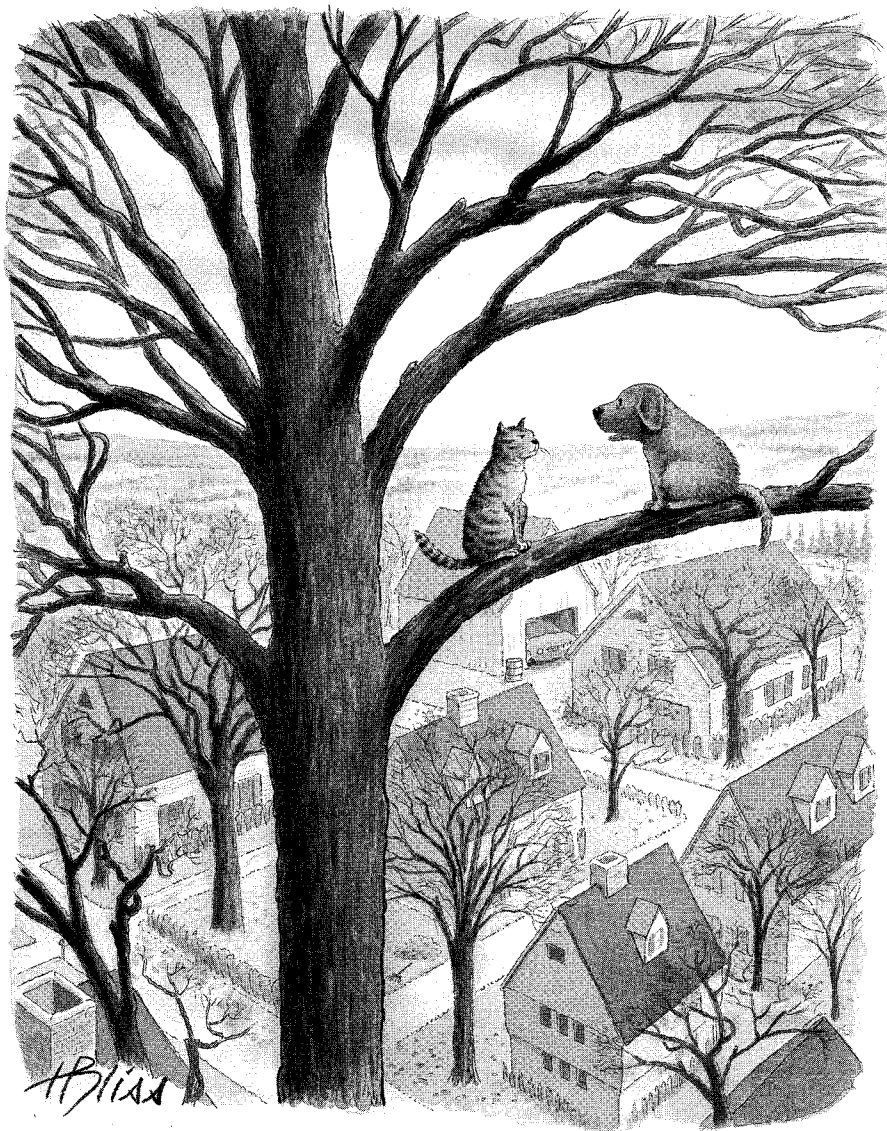
Garbo, Katharine Hepburn, and Tallulah Bankhead—all faithful clients. She squared the lines of the jacket, tapered them like an inverted trapezoid, and bulked up the shoulders to minimize the natural pear shape of the average woman, who was exhorted, in another commandment, to train her body to the modernist geometry of her clothes rather than fit her clothes to the baroque curves of her body. Joan Crawford brought her Schiaparellis back to Hollywood and threw them like a gauntlet at Adrian, who made their linebacker shoulders and lavish embellishment his own trademarks, and those of nearly every sinewy, flat-hipped, chain-smoking, man-eating, social-climbing, scarlet-clawed screen temptress of the thirties. Schiaparelli called this new look “the Wooden Soldier silhouette.” Her nutcracker princesses—

still cracking nuts—have morphed into the skeletal centurions who stride the modern runway.

Schiaparelli was an unlikely couturier, and not merely because she never learned to sew. She was born in Rome in 1890, in an apartment in the Palazzo Corsini, near St. Peter’s, into a conservative family of aristocrats and intellectuals. Her father was the head of the Lincei Library, and a translator of Arabic literature. Her Neapolitan mother was descended from the Dukes of Tuscany. Both parents were pious, as was Schiaparelli’s older sister, Beatrice, who devoted her life to refurbishing churches and illustrating a children’s Bible. It seems unfair that Beatrice inherited the smoldering maternal beauty that her naughty, rebellious sibling would certainly have

used to commit erotic arson. Elsa was short and wan, with the severe features of a Spanish duenna, though her smile could irradiate the stony contours of her face like the stormy light of an El Greco landscape. Nerve generates its own radiance, and in retouched portraits by great photographers Schiaparelli is almost lovely and always intriguing. As a young woman, with a pixie haircut and trim ankles, she was mistaken for Anna Pavlova, who was dancing in Havana when Elsa visited Cuba as the travelling companion of a beautiful and richly kept though tone-deaf Polish opera singer who was booed off the stage. A distinguished paternal uncle, Giovanni Schiaparelli, the astronomer who discovered the canals of Mars, tried to console his brilliant niece for the cluster of birthmarks on her right cheek by noting their resemblance to the Big Dipper—a mark of good fortune, he said—and she eventually decided to believe him. Her mature work asserts that there is nothing so lowly or absurd—lobsters, pork chops, insects, dancing cows, garden vegetables, even flayed skin—that it cannot be transformed into an object of provocative beauty, and she fashioned her lucky stars/ugly moles into an oversized diamond brooch. Strong women, Schiaparelli once remarked, intimidate men, so they are rarely happy in love, but she also understood that strong men secretly relish a frisson of intimidation. Her ideal client was a pugnacious *jolie-laide* like Maria Casarès, who played the role of Death in Cocteau’s “Orphée,” and whom she costumed as the vengeful society woman in Bresson’s “Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne”: a she-devil like herself.

Sacred monsters often begin life as enfants terribles, and little Elsa, like the grande dame Saint Laurent describes, “didn’t wish to please. She wanted to dominate.” She once jumped out a window to prove that she could fly, and “planted” flower seeds in her nose and ears, hoping to make beauty bloom. She also kissed a boy, then told her confessor, whose outrage seems to have permanently discouraged all subsequent candor—with anyone—on intimate subjects. Her parents discovered that their wayward daughter had written and published an ecstatically received volume of philosophical love poetry entitled “Arethusa” when they read the reviews. (They



“Sheer will, I tell you—sheer will.”

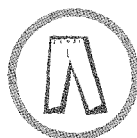
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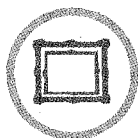
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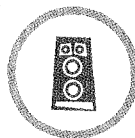
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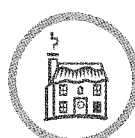
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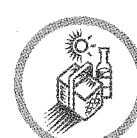
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refused to read the book.) Two years later, at twenty-three, and by now dangerously bored, Elsa was dispatched to live with family friends who ran a progressive home for orphans in the wholesome English countryside. On a day off in London, she wandered into a lecture on theosophy given in French by a charismatic and impossibly handsome half-Swiss, half-Breton nobleman, Count Wilhelm Wendt de Kerlor. He and Elsa became engaged twenty-four hours later and married before her parents could intervene. In 1916, the impetuous young couple emigrated to New York, where Kerlor's soulful, orotund drivel and chiselled profile earned him a rapt feminine following. According to White, Elsa was "greatly impressed" by the city's "stark, vertical lines," its gridiron streets; its corsetless, enfranchised women; the ubiquity of household appliances and violent movies (particularly those with car chases); and by American social mobility, all of which influenced her sense of style. Unfortunately, her sexually mobile husband abandoned her for an affair with Isadora Duncan, and she was left pregnant and practically penniless to fend for herself. (Here I must confess to feeling base gratitude, on Schiaparelli's behalf, to Dilys Blum, for noting in her chronology that Duncan caught her scarf in the axle of a car and was strangled to death a month after the *succès fou* of Schiaparelli's bow-knit sweater.) When her baby arrived—Maria Luisa, nicknamed Gogo, the mother-to-be of the actress Marisa Berenson and the late photographer Berry Berenson Perkins—Schiaparelli parked her with a nurse in Connecticut "for her health" and moved to Patchin Place, in Greenwich Village, where she picked up a series of odd jobs and a circle of artistic friends. Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp introduced her to the nascent Dada movement; Edward Steichen educated her about modern architecture and photography; and the musician Gabrielle Picabia—the wife of the Dadaist painter Francis—gave her a disastrously uncongenial first job in fashion, as a sort of Avon lady, helping to sell, out of a hotel room, a collection of French couture designed by the sister of Paul Poiret.

The rustic air of normalcy wasn't at all beneficial to Gogo's health: she contracted polio. In 1922, Schiaparelli returned to Paris as a thirty-two-year-

old divorcée with a toddler in desperate need of expensive care. Elsa's father had died, and her mother provided a small allowance that would have been more generous had the prodigal moved back to Rome. New York, however, had given her a taste of freedom. "Poverty forced me to work," Schiaparelli told an interviewer, "and Paris gave me a liking for it." Necessity may explain a knack for invention but not a genius for it. Schiaparelli had no schooling or background in her exclusive and arcane métier, and very little hands-on experience with making clothes. Yet her ascent, as nearly every contemporary observer noted—including Janet Flanner, the Paris correspondent for this magazine, who profiled the couturier in 1932—was "cometlike." In 1923, she was improvising amateurish though fetching garments for her girlfriends and shepherding rich Americans around the couture showrooms. In 1925, she was hired to design dresses for a small house funded by a Mrs. Hartley that closed in 1926. A year later, her first collection was being lionized by *Vogue* and snapped up by New York department stores. In 1934, *Time* put her on its cover. Her addresses kept pace with her fortunes, and in 1935 she settled her salons and workshops into a ninety-eight-room mansion on the Place Vendôme. Jean-Michel Frank designed the interiors and Alberto Giacometti the ashtrays. From her front windows, Schiaparelli could contemplate the effigy of another short, saturnine upstart who conquered Paris: Napoleon.

Schiaparelli did her greatest work in the latter half of the nineteen-thirties, her period of collaboration with Dali and Cocteau on dresses and accessories that blurred the boundaries between art and fashion. In his autobiography, Dali describes Schiaparelli's salon as the true, beating heart of Surrealist Paris: "Here new morphological phenomena occurred; here the essence of things was to become transubstantiated." The Futurists had celebrated the power of machines and science to transform human nature; the Surrealists explored the possibilities of metamorphosis while disavowing any faith in its benignity. The beauty of Schiaparelli's Surrealist couture is both troubling and hilarious—Surrealism is a tragicomic genre—and it anticipates the experiments of fantasists like Alexander

McQueen and of mad scientists of couture like Margiela or the young New York collective As Four, whose hybrid creations seem to reflect mimetically on the manipulation of nature by genetic research and transplant surgery.

Cocteau supplied the line drawings that Schiaparelli transformed into embroideries on two memorable pieces in her 1937 collection, and she designed

the costumes for the heroine of his play "Les Monstres Sacrés." A painting by Magritte suggested her shaggy ankle booties of black monkey fur. Her vagina-shaped fedora, photographed by Man Ray, was used to illustrate a theoretical text by Tristan Tzara. With Dali, she conceived her famous cocktail

hats shaped like pork chops and high-heeled shoes. Dali's painting for the June 15, 1936, cover of the Surrealist magazine *Minotaure*, edited by André Breton, was the inspiration for several of her dresses. It shows a woman with a bull's head; an open bureau drawer where her breasts should be; a lobster emerging from a cavity in her stomach; and legs—one of them sutured, à la Frankenstein—hollowed out with compartments for an absinthe glass and a bottle. Schiaparelli subsequently designed a suit with "bureau-drawer" pockets; a "skeleton dress" with a padded rib cage; and the notoriously phallic "lobster" frock, embellished with sprigs of parsley, that Wallis Simpson chose for her trousseau (along with seventeen other Schiaparellis). Dali had wanted Schiaparelli to smear the skirt with mayonnaise, but she demurred. Cecil Beaton persuaded the future Duchess of Windsor to model the creation in a gauzy engagement photograph intended to soften her image, though it is difficult to see how the lady's reputation as a predator could have been improved by association with an avant-garde *revoltée* (Schiaparelli); the fetishist who painted "Necrophiliac Springtime" (Dali); and a bottom-feeding crustacean. The last and most shocking, at least in retrospect, of Schiaparelli's duets with Dali was the "tear" dress of 1938. The silk of a simple sheath with a swallowtail train seems to have been tortured by a hunting knife, as if it were the skin of a furry animal flayed to expose the bloody flesh beneath. Appli-

qués on the matching veil reproduce the trompe-l'oeil incisions in three dimensions. Hitler invaded Poland a year later.

Chanel spent the war shackled up with a Nazi officer at the Ritz, on the Place Vendôme, from whose windows she could have looked down upon her rival's salon. Schiaparelli fled to New York, where, in 1942, she helped Marcel Duchamp organize "First Papers of Surrealism," an exhibition that raised funds for a consortium of French relief charities. She settled in Princeton, promoted her perfumes, lectured on fashion to adoring crowds, and volunteered as a nurse's aide at Bellevue. The Roosevelts entertained her at

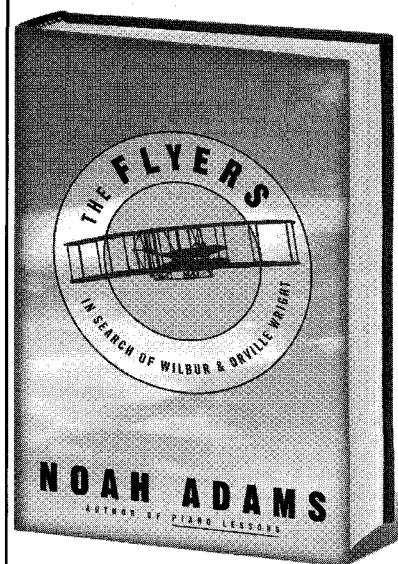
the White House. Though various manufacturers offered to bankroll a collection, she refused to design clothes in exile, out of loyalty to, and solidarity with, the couturiers and artisans of Occupied Paris. When the war ended, she reclaimed her seventeenth-century mansion on the Rue de Berri, which had been commandeered by the Germans. White relates that she found a desk drawer filled with the visiting cards of French celebrities who had been received there, "and she never invited one of them again." She cranked up her business, doubled the salary of everyone on her staff, and staged a comeback with bustled gowns, wasp-waisted suits, and sportswear influenced by British Army uniforms. Her postwar collections were critically well received, and her licensing agreements with America continued to provide a handsome source of income, but the economics of couture had changed, and, while searching for her bearings in a much altered landscape, she began, for the first time—fatally—to look back.

On February 3, 1954, two days before Chanel emerged from retirement to reopen her atelier on the Rue Cambon, Schiaparelli presented what would prove to be her farewell show. She filed for bankruptcy ten months later. Her work was out of tune with the tastes of a conservative postwar public unwilling to think too hard, and weary of irony and aggression. Chanel became a household word, and Schiaparelli a name that the world forgot how to pronounce. It's skYAP-a-relli. The "ch" is hard: like her chic. ♦



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GHOSTS IN THE HOUSE

How Toni Morrison fostered a generation of black writers.

BY HILTON ALS

No. 2245 Elyria Avenue in Lorain, Ohio, is a two-story frame house surrounded by look-alikes. Its small front porch is littered with the discards of former tenants: a banged-up bicycle wheel, a plastic patio chair, a garden hose. Most of its windows are boarded up. Behind the house, which is painted lettuce green, there's a patch of weedy earth and a heap of rusting car parts. Seventy-two years ago, the novelist Toni Morrison was born here, in this small industrial town twenty-five miles west of Cleveland, which most citydwellers would consider "out there." The air is redolent of nearby Lake Erie and new-mown grass.

From Morrison's birthplace it's a couple of miles to Broadway, where there's a pizzeria, a bar with sagging seats, and a brown building that sells dingy and dilapidated secondhand furniture. This is the building Morrison imagined when she described the house of the doomed Breedlove family in her first novel, "The Bluest Eye": "There is an abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio," she wrote. "It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the gray frame houses and black telephone poles around it. Rather, it foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. Visitors who drive to this tiny town wonder why it has not been torn down, while pedestrians, who are residents of the neighborhood, simply look away when they pass it."

Love and disaster and all the other forms of human incident accumulate in Morrison's fictional houses. In the boarding house where the heroine of Morrison's second novel, "Sula," lives, "there were rooms that had three doors, others that opened on the porch only

and were inaccessible from any other part of the house; others that you could get to only by going through somebody's bedroom." This is the gothic, dream-like structure in whose front yard Sula's mother burns to death, "gesturing and bobbing like a sprung jack-in-the-box," while Sula stands by watching, "not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested."

Morrison's houses don't just shelter human dramas; they have dramas of their own. "124 was spiteful," she writes in the opening lines of "Beloved" (1987). "Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way." Living and dead ghosts ramble through No. 124, chained to a history that claims its inhabitants. At the center of Morrison's new novel, "Love," is a deserted seaside hotel—a resort where, in happier times, blacks danced and socialized and swam without any white people complaining that they would contaminate the water—built by Bill Cosey, a legendary black entrepreneur, and haunted by his memory.

Morrison spends about half her time in a converted boathouse that overlooks the Hudson in Rockland County. The boathouse is a long, narrow, blue structure with white trim and large windows. A decade ago, when Morrison was in Princeton, where she teaches, it burned to the ground. Because it was a very cold winter, the water the firefighters used froze several important artifacts, including Morrison's manuscripts. "But what they can't save are little things that mean a lot, like your children's report cards," she told me, her eyes filling with tears. She shook her head and said, "Let's not go there."

We were in the third-floor parlor, furnished with overstuffed chairs covered in crisp gray linen, where we talked over the course of two days last summer. Sun streamed through the windows and a beautiful blue-toned abstract painting by the younger of her two sons, Slade, hung on the wall. As we chatted, Morrison wasn't in the least distracted by the telephone ringing or the activities of her housekeeper or her secretary. She is known for her powers of concentration. When she is not writing or teaching, she likes to watch "Law & Order" and "Waking the Dead"—crime shows that offer what she described as "mild engagement with a satisfying structure of redemption." She reads and rereads novels by Ruth Rendell and Martha Grimes.

Morrison had on a white shirt over a black leotard, black trousers, and a pair of high-heeled alligator sandals. Her long silver dreadlocks cascaded down her back and were gathered at the end by a silver clip. When she was mock-amazed by an insight, she flushed. Her light-brown eyes, with their perpetually listening or amused expression, are the eyes of a watcher—and of someone who is used to being watched. But if she is asked a question she doesn't appreciate, a veil descends over her eyes, discontinuing the conversation. (When I tried to elicit her opinion about the novels of one of her contemporaries, she said, "I hear the movie is fab," and turned away.) Morrison's conversation, like her fiction, is conducted in high style. She underlines important points by making showy arabesques with her fingers in the air, and when she is amused she lets out a cry that's followed by a fusillade of laughter.

"You know, my sister Lois was just

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

"Being a black woman writer is not a shallow place to write from," Morrison says. "It doesn't limit my imagination; it expands it."



here taking care of me," she said. "I had a cataract removed in one eye. Suddenly, the world was so bright. And I looked at myself in the mirror and wondered, Who is that woman? When did she get to be that age? My doctor said, 'You have been looking at yourself through the lens that they shoot Elizabeth Taylor through.' I couldn't stop wondering how I got to be this age."

When "The Bluest Eye" was published, in 1970, Morrison was unknown and thirty-nine years old. The initial print run was modest: two thousand copies in hardcover. Now a first edition can fetch upward of six thousand dollars. In 2000, when "The Bluest Eye" became a selection for Oprah's Book Club, Plume sold more than eight hundred thousand paperback copies. By then, Toni Morrison had become Toni Morrison—the first African-American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1993. Following "The Bluest Eye," Morrison published seven more novels: "Sula" (1973), "Song of Solomon" (1977), "Tar Baby" (1981), "Beloved" (1987), "Jazz" (1992), "Paradise" (1998), and now

"Love." Morrison also wrote a critical study, "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination" (1992), which, like all her novels since "Song of Solomon," became a best-seller. She has edited several anthologies—about O.J., about the Clarence Thomas hearings—as well as collections of the writings of Huey P. Newton and James Baldwin. With her son Slade, she has co-authored a number of books for children. She wrote the book for a musical, "New Orleans" (1983); a play, "Dreaming Emmett" (1986), which reimagined the life and death of Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old black boy who was murdered in Mississippi in 1955; a song cycle with the composer André Previn; and, most recently, an opera based on the life of Margaret Garner, the slave whose story inspired "Beloved." She was an editor at Random House for nineteen years—she still reads the *Times* with pencil in hand, copy-editing as she goes—and has been the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of the Humanities at Princeton since 1989.

"I know it seems like a lot," Morri-

son said. "But I really only do one thing. I read books. I teach books. I write books. I think about books. It's one job." What Morrison has managed to do with that job—and the criticism, pro and con, she has received for doing it—has made her one of the most widely written-about American authors of the past fifty years. (The latest study of her work, she told me, is a comparison of the vernacular in her novels and William Faulkner's. "I don't believe it," I said. "*Believe it*," she said, emphatically.) Morrison—required reading in high schools across the country—is almost always treated as a spokeswoman for her gender and her race. In a review of "Paradise," Patricia Storace wrote, "Toni Morrison is relighting the angles from which we view American history, changing the very color of its shadows, showing whites what they look like in black mirrors. To read her work is to witness something unprecedented, an invitation to a literature to become what it has claimed to be, a truly American literature." It's a claim that her detractors would also make, to opposite effect.

"I'm already discredited, I'm already politicized, before I get out of the gate," Morrison said. "I can accept the labels"—the adjectives like "black" and "female" that are often attached to her work—"because being a black woman writer is not a shallow place but a rich place to write from. It doesn't limit my imagination; it expands it. It's richer than being a white male writer because I know more and I've experienced more."

Morrison also owns a home in Princeton, where nine years ago she founded the Princeton Atelier, a program that invites writers and performing artists to workshop student plays, stories, and music. (Last year, she brought in the poet Paul Muldoon as a co-director.) "I don't write when I'm teaching," she said. "Teaching is about taking things apart; writing is about putting things together." She and her sons own an apartment building farther up the



"In my ad, I lied about my age."

Hudson, which houses artists, and another building across the street from it, which her elder son Ford, an architect, is helping her remodel into a study and performance center. "My sister Lois said that the reason I buy all these houses is because we had to move so often as children," Morrison said, laughing.

Morrison's family—the Woffords—lived in at least six different apartments over the course of her childhood. One of them was set on fire by the landlord when the Woffords couldn't pay the rent—four dollars a month. In those days, Toni, the second of four children (she had two brothers, now dead), was called Chloe Ardelia. Her parents, George and Ramah, like the Breedloves, were originally from the South (Ramah was born in Greenville, Alabama; George in Cartersville, Georgia). Like many transplanted Southerners, George worked at U.S. Steel, which was particularly active during the Second World War and attracted not only American blacks but also displaced Europeans: Poles, Greeks, and Italians.

Morrison describes her father as a perfectionist, someone who was proud of his work. "I remember my daddy taking me aside—this was when he worked as a welder—and telling me that he welded a perfect seam that day, and that after welding the perfect seam he put his initials on it," she recalled. "I said, 'Daddy, no one will ever see that.' Sheets and sheets of siding would go over that, you know? And he said, 'Yes, but I'll know it's there.'" George also worked odd jobs, washing cars and the like, after hours at U.S. Steel. Morrison remembers that he always had at least two other jobs.

Ramah, a devout member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was a homemaker. From the first, it was clear that Morrison was not made to follow in her footsteps. "I remember going outside to hang some clothes on the line," she said. "And I held the pants up, I hooked them by the inside pockets. And whatever else I was doing, it was completely wrong. Then my mother or my grandmother came out and they just started to laugh, because I didn't know how to hang up clothes." Her parents seemed to have different expectations for her, anyway. "I developed a kind of individualism—apart from the family—that was

very much involved in my own day-dreaming, my own creativity, and my own reading. But primarily—and this has been true all my life—not really minding what other people said, just not minding."

The Woffords told their children stories and sang songs. After dinner, their grandfather would sometimes take out his violin and everyone would dance. And no matter how many times Ramah told the ghost stories she had learned from her mother and her Auntie Bell in Alabama, Chloe always wanted to hear more. She used to say, "Mama, please tell the story about this or that," her mother recalled in a 1982 interview with the *Lorain Journal*. "Finally I'd get tired of telling the stories over and over again. So I made up a new story." Ramah's stories sparked Morrison's imagination. She fell in love with spoken language.

Morrison always lived, she said, "below or next to white people," and the schools were integrated—stratification in Lorain was more economic than racial—but in the Wofford house there was an intense suspicion of white people. In a 1976 essay, Morrison recalled watching her father attack a white man he'd discovered lurking in their apartment building. "My father, distrusting every word and every gesture of every white man on earth, assumed that the white man who crept up the stairs one afternoon had come to molest his daughters and threw him down the stairs and then our tricycle after him. (I think my father was wrong, but considering what I have seen since, it may have been very healthy for me to have witnessed that as my first black-white encounter.)" I asked her about the story. "The man was a threat to us, we thought," Morrison replied. "He scared us. I'm sure that man was drunk, you know, but the important thing was the notion that my father was a protector, and particularly against the white man. Seeing that physical confrontation with a white man and knowing that my father could win thrilled, excited, and pleased me. It made me know that it was possible to win."

Morrison's family was spread along a color spectrum. "My great-grandmother

was very black, and because we were light-skinned blacks, she thought that we had been 'tampered with,'" she said. "She found lighter-skinned blacks to be impure—which was the opposite of what the world was saying about skin color and the hierarchy of skin color. My father, who was light-skinned, also preferred darker-skinned blacks." Morrison, who didn't absorb her father's racism, continues to grapple with these ideas and argue against their implications. In a television interview some years ago, she said that in art "there should be everything from Hasidic Jews to Walter Lipp-

mann. Or, as I was telling a friend, there should be everything from reggae hair to Ralph Bunche. There should be an effort to strengthen the differences and keep them, so long as no one is punished for them." Morrison addressed her great-grandmother's notion of racial purity in "Paradise," where it is the oppressive basis for a utopian community formed by a group of dark blacks from the South.

As a child, Morrison read virtually everything, from drawing-room comedies to Theodore Dreiser, from Jane Austen to Richard Wright. She was compiling, in her head, a reading list to mine for inspiration. At Hawthorne Junior High School, she read "Huckleberry Finn" for the second time. "Fear and alarm are what I remember most about my first encounter" with it, she wrote several years ago. "My second reading of it, under the supervision of an English teacher in junior high school, was no less uncomfortable—rather more. It provoked a feeling I can only describe now as muffled rage, as though appreciation of the work required my complicity in and sanction of something shaming. Yet the satisfactions were great: riveting episodes of flight, of cunning; the convincing commentary on adult behavior, watchful and insouciant; the authority of a child's voice in language cut for its renegade tongue and sharp intelligence. Nevertheless, for the second time, curling through the pleasure, clouding the narrative reward, was my original alarm, coupled now with a profoundly distasteful complicity."

When she was twelve years old,





"How can a fund that's losing us money call itself socially responsible?"

Morrison converted to Catholicism, taking Anthony as her baptismal name, after St. Anthony. Her friends shortened it to Toni. In junior high, one of her teachers sent a note home to her mother: "You and your husband would be remiss in your duties if you do not see to it that this child goes to college." Shortly before graduating from Lorain High School—where she was on the debating team, on the yearbook staff, and in the drama club ("I wanted to be a dancer, like Maria Tallchief")—Morrison told her parents that she'd like to go to college. "I want to be surrounded by black intellectuals," she said, and chose Howard University, in Washington, D.C. In support of her decision, George Wofford took a second union job, which was against the rules of U.S. Steel. In the *Lorain Journal* article, Ramah Wofford remembered that his supervisors found out and called him on it. "Well, you folks got me," Ramah recalled George's telling them. "I am doing another job, but I'm doing it to send my daughter to college. I'm determined to send her and if I lose my job here, I'll get another job and do

the same.' It was so quiet after George was done talking, you could have heard a pin drop. . . . And they let him stay and let him do both jobs." To give her daughter pocket money, Ramah Wofford worked in the rest room of an amusement park, handing out towels. She sent the tips to her daughter with care packages of canned tuna, crackers, and sardines.

Morrison loved her classes at Howard, but she found the social climate stifling. In Washington in the late forties, the buses were still segregated and the black high schools were divided by skin tone, as in the Deep South. The system was replicated at Howard. "On campus itself, the students were very much involved in that ranking, and your skin gave you access to certain things," Morrison said. "There was something called 'the paper-bag test'—darker than the paper bag put you in one category, similar to the bag put you in another, and lighter was yet another and the most privileged category. I thought them to be idiotic preferences." She was drawn to the drama department, which she felt was more interested in talent than in

skin color, and toured the South with the Howard University Players. The itineraries were planned very carefully, but once in a while, because of inclement weather or a flat tire, the troupe would arrive in a town too late to check in to the "colored" motel. Then one of the professors would open the Yellow Pages and call the minister of the local Zion or Baptist church, and the players would be put up by members of the congregation. "There was something not just endearing but welcoming and restorative in the lives of those people," she said. "I think the exchange between Irving Howe and Ralph Ellison is along those lines: Ralph Ellison said something nice about living in the South, and Irving Howe said, 'Why would you want to live in such an evil place?' Because all he was thinking about was red-necks. And Ralph Ellison said, 'Black people live there.'"

After graduating from Howard, in 1953, she went on to Cornell, where she earned a master's degree in American literature, writing a thesis titled "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated." What she saw in their work—"an effort to discover what pattern of existence is most conducive to honesty and self-knowledge, the prime requisites for living a significant life"—she emulated in her own life. She went back to Howard to teach, and Stokely Carmichael was one of her students. Around this time, she met and married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican-born architect. She joined a writing group, where the one rule was that you had to bring something to read every week. Among the writers in that group were the playwright and director Owen Dodson and his companion the painter Charles Sebree. At first, Morrison said, she brought in "all that old junk from high school." Then she began writing a story about a little black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who wanted blue eyes.

"I wanted to take the name of Peola"—the "tragic mulatto" character from the 1934 movie *Imitation of Life*—"and play with it, turn it around," Morrison said. When she was young, she said, "another little black girl and I were discussing whether there was a real God or not. I said there was, and she said there wasn't and she had proof: she had prayed for, and not been given, blue eyes.

I just remember listening to her and imagining her with blue eyes, and it was a grotesque thing. She had these high cheekbones and these great big slanted dark eyes, and all I remember thinking was that if she had blue eyes she would be horrible."

When Morrison read the story to the writing group, Sebree turned to her and said, "*You are a writer.*"

In 1964, Morrison returned to Lorain. Her marriage had fallen apart and she had to determine how she was going to take care of her family—her son Ford was three years old and Slade was on the way. An ad in *The New York Review of Books* listed a position with L. W. Singer, a textbook division of Random House that was based in Syracuse. Morrison applied for and got the job. She took her babies (Slade was born in 1965) and moved East. She was thirty-four years old. In Syracuse, she didn't care to socialize; instead, she returned to the story about the girl who wanted blue eyes and began to expand it. She wrote when she could—usually after the children went to sleep. And since she was the sole support for her children, she couldn't sacrifice the real world for her art. "*I stole time to write,*" she said. "*Writing was my other job—I always kept it over there, away from my 'real' work as an editor or teacher.*" It took her five years to complete the book, because she enjoyed the process so much.

Holt, Rinehart & Winston published "*The Bluest Eye*" in 1970, with a picture of Morrison lying on her side against a white backdrop, her hair cut in an Afro. Taken at the moment when fashion met the counterculture—when Black was coöpted as Beautiful and soul-food recipes ran in fashion magazines next to images of Black Panther wives tying their heads up in bright fabric—the picture was the visual equivalent of the book: black, female, individualistic.

Set in Lorain at the end of the Depression, "*The Bluest Eye*" remains the most autobiographical of Morrison's novels. In it, she focusses on the lives of little black girls—per-

haps the least likely, least commercially viable story one could tell at the time. Morrison positioned the white world at the periphery; black life was at the center, and black females were at the center of that. Morrison wasn't sentimental about the black community. Cholly Breedlove rapes his daughter Pecola because it is one of the few forms of power he has ("How dare she love him?" he thinks. "Hadn't she any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile?"); a group of children scapegoat her as her misfortune worsens ("All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness"); and three whores are her only source of tenderness ("Pecola loved them, visited them, and ran their errands. They, in turn, did not despise her").

The writing, on the other hand, was lush, sensible-minded, and often hilarious. If Morrison had a distinctive style, it was in her rhythms: the leisurely pace of her storytelling. Clearly her writing had grown out of an oral tradition. Rather than confirm the reader's sense of alienation by employing distancing techniques, Morrison coaxed the reader into believing the tale. She rooted her characters' lives in something real—certainly in the minds of black readers.

This came at a time when the prevailing sensibility in most American novels was urban and male, an outgrowth of the political and personal concerns that Ellison and Bellow, Baldwin and Roth had developed living in predominantly black or Jewish neighborhoods. Morrison was different. She grew up in an integrated town in the heart of America. "The point was to really open a book that's about black people, or by a black person, me or anybody," she said. "In the sixties, most of the literature was understood by the critics as something sociological, a kind of revelation of the lives of these people. So there was a little apprehension, you know—Is it going to make me feel bad, is it going to make me feel good? I said, I'm going to make it as readable as I can, but I'm not going to pull any punches. I don't have an agenda here."

One of the few critics to embrace Morrison's work was John Leonard, who wrote in the *Times*, "Miss Morrison exposes the negative of the Dick-and-Jane-and-Mother-and-Father-and-Dog-and-Cat photograph that appears in our reading primers and she does it with a prose so precise, so faithful to speech and so charged with pain and wonder that the novel becomes poetry. . . . 'The Bluest Eye' is also history, sociology, folklore, nightmare and music."

The poet Sonia Sanchez, who taught



"The Bluest Eye" in her classroom at Temple University, saw the book as an indictment of American culture. For Pecola, the descendant of slaves, to want the master's blue eyes represents the "second generation of damage in America," Sanchez told me. "For this woman, Toni Morrison, to write this, to show this to us—it was the possible death of a people right there, the death of a younger generation that had been so abused that there was really no hope. What Toni has done with her literature is that she has made us look up and see ourselves. She has authenticated us, and she has also said to America, in a sense, 'Do you know what you did? But, in spite of what you did, here we is. We exist. Look at us.'"

"What was driving me to write was the silence—so many stories untold and unexamined. There was a wide vacuum in the literature," Morrison said. "I was inspired by the silence and absences in the literature." The story she told was a distinctly American one: complicated, crowded, eventful, told from the perspective of innocents. "I think of the voice of the novel as a kind of Greek chorus, one that comments on the action," she once said. She was a social realist, like Dreiser, with the lyricism and storytelling genius of someone like Isak Dinesen.

In 1968, Morrison was transferred to New York to work in Random House's scholastic division. She moved to Queens. ("I never lived in Manhattan," she said. "I always wanted a garden.") A couple of years later, Robert Bernstein, who was then the president of Random House, came across "The Bluest Eye" in a bookstore. "Is this the same woman who works in the scholastic division?" he asked Jason Epstein, then the editorial director of Random House. Morrison had been wanting to move into trade publishing, and went to see Robert Gottlieb, the editor-in-chief of Knopf, an imprint of Random House. Gottlieb recalled the interview: "I said, 'I like you too much to hire you, because in order to hire you I have to feel free to fire you. But I'd love to publish your books.'" He became her editor, and Morrison got a job under Epstein as a trade editor at Random House.

At Random House, Morrison pub-

lished Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, and Angela Davis, among others. She was responsible for "The Myth of Lesbianism," one of the first studies of the subject from a major publisher, and "Giant Talk," Quincy Troupe and Rainer Schulte's anthology of Third World writing. Morrison gave me a copy of one of the first books she worked on, "Contemporary African Literature," published in 1972, a groundbreaking collection that included work by Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Léopold-Sédar Senghor, and Athol Fugard. (For some of them, it was their first publication in America.) The book is lavishly illustrated, with many color photographs of African tribesmen and African landscapes. Showing me the table of contents, Morrison said, "What was I thinking? I thought if it was beautiful, people would buy it." (Not many did.)

The women she worked with, in particular, became some of her closest friends. "Single women with children," she said, when I asked her about that era. "If you had to finish writing something, they'd take your kids, or you'd sit with theirs. This was a network of women. They lived in Queens, in Harlem and Brooklyn, and you could rely on one another. If I made a little extra money on something—writing freelance—I'd send a check to Toni Cade with a note that said, 'You have won the so-and-so grant,' and so on. I remember Toni Cade coming to my house with groceries and cooking dinner. I hadn't asked her." The support was intellectual as well as practical. Sonia Sanchez told me, "I think we all looked up and saw that we were writing in different genres, but we were experiencing the same kinds of things, and saying similar kinds of things." Their books formed a critical core that people began to see as the rebirth of black women's fiction.

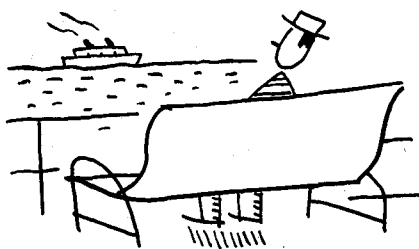
Before the late sixties, there was no real Black Studies curriculum in the academy—let alone a post-colonial-

studies program or a feminist one. As an editor and author, Morrison, backed by the institutional power of Random House, provided the material for those discussions to begin. The advent of Black Studies undoubtedly helped Morrison, too: "It was the academic community that gave 'The Bluest Eye' its life," she said. "People assigned it in class. Students bought the paperback."

In order to get attention for her authors—publishers still thought that the ideal book buyer was a thirty-year-old Long Island woman, and reviewers would lump together books by Ishmael Reed and Angela Davis, along with children's books, in a single article—Morrison decided to concentrate on one African-American text each season. She worked diligently. "I wanted to give back something," she said. "I wasn't marching. I didn't go to anything. I didn't join anything. But I could make sure there was a published record of those who did march and did put themselves on the line. And I didn't want to fail my grandmother. I didn't want to hear her say, 'You went to college and this is all you thought up?'" She laughed. "Compared to what my family had gone through and what I felt was my responsibility, the corporation's interest was way down on the list. I was not going to do anything that I thought was nutty or disrupt anything. I thought it was beneficial generally, just like I thought that the books were going to make them a lot of money!"

Morrison's view of contemporary black literature transcended the limitations of the "down with honky" school of black nationalism popularized by writers like Eldridge Cleaver and George Jackson. She preferred to publish writers who had something to say about black American life that reflected its rich experience. In 1974, she put together "The Black Book," a compendium of photographs, drawings, songs, letters, and other documents that charts black American history from slavery through Reconstruction to modern times. The book exercised a great influence over the way black anthropology was viewed.

At first, Random House resisted the idea of "The Black Book." "It just looked to them like a disaster," Morrison said. "Not so much in the way it was being put together, but because they



NIGHT LIFE BY EVER MEULEN



didn't know how to sell it. 'Who is going to buy something called "The Black Book?"' I had my mother on the cover—what were they talking about?' She wrote about the project in the February 2, 1974, issue of *Black World*: "So what was Black life like before it went on TV? . . . I spent the last 18 months trying to do a book that would show some of that. A genuine Black history book—one that simply recollected Black Life as lived. It has no 'order,' no chapters, no major themes. But it does have coherence and sinew. . . . I don't know if it's beautiful or not (it is elegant, however), but it is intelligent, it is profound, it is alive, it is visual, it is creative, it is complex, and it is ours."

Despite all misgivings, the book garnered extraordinary reviews. Writing in the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, Alvin Beam said, "Editors, like novelists, have brain children—books they think up and

bring to life without putting their own names on the title page. Mrs. Morrison has one of these in the stores now, and magazines and newsletters in the publishing trade are ecstatic, saying it will go like hotcakes."

Morrison got a letter from a man in prison who had read the book. "Somebody had given him a copy, and he wrote to say thank you," Morrison told me. "And then he said, 'I need two more copies, because I need one to pass out to other people, and I need another one to throw up against the wall. And I need the one I have to hold close.' So there were readers on, quote, 'both sides of the street,' which is the way they put it." I recall buying "The Black Book" as a teenager and feeling as if I had been given a road map of the Brooklyn community where I lived at the time.

"Toni became not a black editor but *the* black editor," a friend of hers

told me. In 1975, D. Keith Mano, the "Book Watch" columnist for *Esquire*, devoted an entire article to Gayl Jones and her new book, "Corregidora," but the piece was as much about Morrison as about Jones. "Toni Morrison is Gayl's Svengali editor at Random House," Mano wrote. "Toni is dynamic, witty, even boisterous in a good-humored way. And sharp. Very sharp. She often uses the pronoun I. She'll say, 'I published "Corregidora."'" . . . I suspect the title page of 'Corregidora' should read, 'by Gayl Jones, as told to Toni Morrison.'" If Morrison had been a man or white, it seems unlikely that Mano would have noticed her championing of an author. Jones was uncommunicative and Morrison had books to sell. If a writer needed fussing, she fussed, and if not, not.

Morrison was a canny and tireless editor. "You can't be a slouch in Toni's presence," the scholar Eugene Redmond told me. "Her favorite word is 'wakeful.'" (She still gets up at 4 A.M. to work.) When she published the books of Henry Dumas—a little-known novelist and poet whose work was left fragmentary when he was murdered by a transit officer in the New York City subway in 1968, in a case of mistaken identity—she sent copies to Bill Cosby, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and all the major movie executives and television hosts. In a letter inviting people to read at a tribute to Dumas, she wrote, "He was brilliant. He was magnetic and he was an incredible artist. . . . We are determined to bring to the large community of Black artists and Black people in general this man's work."

The racial climate in the mid-seventies made it especially hard for Morrison to promote certain books—books that might be taken as too radical. Morrison remembered that the marketing department balked when she wanted to have a publication party in a club on 125th Street. No one from Random House came—it was rumored that someone in management had cautioned the staff about the danger—except the publicist and her assistant, who said it was the best party they'd ever been to. A couple of news crews showed up, however, and the party was on the evening news, giving the book hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of free publicity, by Mor-

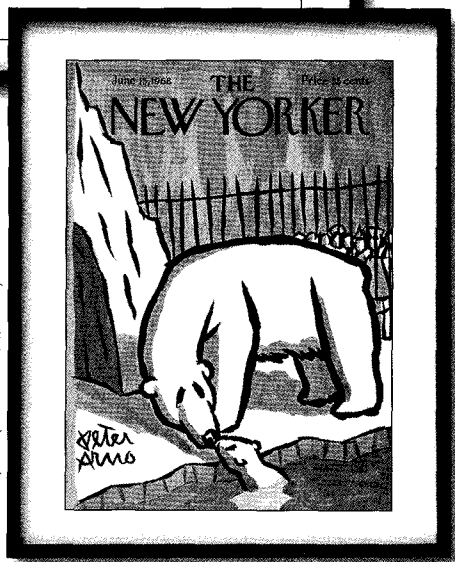


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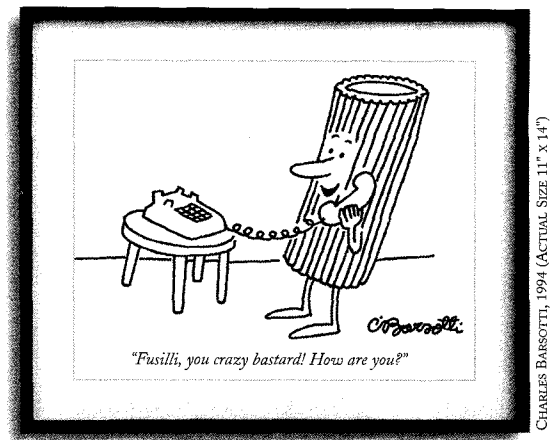


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rierson's reckoning. Similarly, Morrison said, when she brought out Muhammad Ali's autobiography, "The Greatest," in 1976, all the department stores that were approached about hosting the book signing backed out, fearing riots and looting. When E. J. Korvette's, the now defunct department store, agreed to host the signing, Morrison brought in members of the Nation of Islam, who came with their families, as peacekeepers. She also installed a white friend, a woman who worked in the sales department, to guard Ali. "You stand right next to Ali," she said. "And when people come up and punch him—'Hey, Champ!'—you stop them. Because he's not going to say it ever, that it hurts when you get a thousand little taps. And when you think Ali is tired give him a baby to play with. He likes babies." Two thousand people came to E. J. Korvette's, on a rainy night, and, with the Brothers of the Nation of Islam milling around in the crowd, everything was serene and orderly.

Throughout the seventies, Morrison worked as a teacher at Yale, SUNY Purchase, Bard, Rutgers, and SUNY Albany. "Random paid about ten cents, so Toni took on teaching jobs," Jason Epstein recalled. In a 1998 interview, she said, "When I wanted a raise, in my employment world, they would give me a little woman's raise and I would say, 'No. This is really low.' And they would say, 'But,' and I would say, 'No, you don't understand. You're the head of the household. You know what you want. That's what I want. I want that. I am on serious business now. This is not girl playing. This is not wife playing. This is serious business. I am the head of a household, and I must work to pay for my children.'"

The Bluest Eye" had made the literary establishment take notice. In "Sula," which was published three years later, Morrison's little colored girls grew up and occupied a more completely rendered world. "The Bluest Eye" was divided by seasons; "Sula" was divided into years, stretching from 1919 to 1965. Again, the story is set in a small Ohio town, in a neighborhood called the Bottom. ("A joke. A nigger joke. That's the way it got started.") Sula Mae Peace, Morrison's heroine, is the progeny of an

eccentric household run by formidable women. She leaves the Bottom in order to reinvent herself. Morrison does not relay what Sula does when she ventures into the world, but her return is catastrophic. (The first sign of impending disaster is a plague of robins.) Her return also brings about a confrontation with her grandmother Eva—a parable of the New Negro Woman confronting the Old World.

At Eva's house there were four dead robins on the walk. Sula stopped and with her toe pushed them into the bordering grass. . . . When Sula opened the door [Eva] raised her eyes and said, "I might have knowned them birds meant something. Where's your coat?"

Sula threw herself on Eva's bed. "The rest of my stuff will be on later."

"I should hope so. Them little old furry tails ain't going to do you no more good than they did the fox that was wearing them."

"Don't you say hello to nobody when you ain't seen them for ten years?"

"If folks let somebody know where they is and when they coming, then other folks can get ready for them. If they don't—if they just pop in all sudden like—then they got to take whatever mood they find."

"How you been doing, Big Mamma?"

"Gettin' by. Sweet of you to ask. You was quick enough when you wanted something. When you needed a little change or . . ."

"Don't talk to me about how much you gave me, Big Mamma, and how much I owe you or none of that."

"Oh? I ain't supposed to mention it?"

"OK. Mention it." Sula shrugged and turned over on her stomach, her buttocks toward Eva.

"You ain't been in this house ten seconds and already you starting something."

"Takes two, Big Mamma."

"Well, don't let your mouth start nothing that your ass can't stand. When you gone to get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you."

"I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself."

"Pus mouth! God's going to strike you!"

"Which God? The one watched you burn Plum [Eva's son]?"

"Don't talk to me about no burning. You watched your own mamma. You crazy roach! You the one should have been burnt!"

"But I ain't. Got that? I ain't. Any more fires in this house, I'm lighting them!"

Where I come from, this dialogue doesn't sound so much fictional as documentary; it could be about the women—sisters and cousins—who passed Morrison's books on to me when I was growing up, women who didn't know they were "marginal."

Morrison's interest was in spoken language, heightened and dramatized. (Bob Gottlieb told me that he was always inserting commas into Morrison's sen-

tences and she was always taking them out.) In describing her style, Morrison said, "I thought, Well, I'm going to drop 'g's where the black people dropped 'g's, and the white people on the same street in the same part of the state don't. But there was a distinction in the language and it wasn't in the spelling. It was someplace else." Morrison went on, "Maybe it's because African languages are so tonal, so that with the little shifts in pronunciation, the little shifts in placement, something else happens."

"I was just determined to take the language that for me was so powerfully metaphorical, economical, lunatic, and intelligent at the same time—just these short sentences or these developments of ideas that was the language of my family and neighbors and so on—and not make it exotic or comic or slumming." Zora Neale Hurston, the nineteen-thirties novelist and folklorist, was an example, Morrison said, of a black writer who treated dialogue as a transcript to show white people how it really was in the Florida swamps. Morrison's aim was different. "Street language is lyrical, plus it has this blend of the standard English and the sermonic, as well as the colloquial, you know—that is what I wanted to polish and show, and make it a literary vehicle," Morrison said. (She has succeeded in this to the point of irritating some readers. James Wood, in a review of "Paradise" titled "The Color Purple," wrote, "Morrison is so besotted with making poetry, with the lyrical dyeing of every moment, that she cannot grant characters their own words. . . . She seems to view her people as mere spokes of style, who exist to keep her lyricism in motion.")

Situating herself inside the black world, Morrison undermined the myth of black cohesiveness. With whiteness offstage, or certainly right of center, she showed black people fighting with each other—murdering, raping, breaking up marriages, burning down houses. She also showed nurturing fathers who abide and the matriarchs who love them. Morrison revelled in the complications. "I didn't want it to be a teaching tool for white people. I wanted it to be true—not from outside the culture, as a writer looking back at it," she said. "I wanted it to come from inside the culture, and speak to people inside the culture. It was

about a refusal to pander or distort or gain political points. I wanted to reveal and raise questions." She is still raising questions: Bill Cosey, the deceased patriarch in "Love," is both beneficent and evil, a guardian and a predator.

Doing so, Morrison broke ranks—particularly with black male writers such as Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka, who were taking an increasingly militant stance against racism. Their attitude descended from the realistic portraits of black resistance in the novels of Wright, Baldwin, and Ellison—who, Morrison believed, were writing for a white audience. "The title of Ralph Ellison's book was 'Invisible Man,'" Morrison said. "And the question for me was 'Invisible to whom?' Not to me." Morrison refused to present an ideal or speak in unison, even if it meant she was perceived as a traitor. "There is that sense of firm loyalty for black people," she said. "The question is always, Is this going to be useful for the race?"

"I really liked that book," one black woman told Morrison after reading "The Bluest Eye." "But I was frustrated and angry, because I didn't want you to expose us in our lives." Morrison replied, "Well, how can I reach you if I don't expose it to the world?" Others, myself included, accused her of perpetuating rather than dismantling the myth of the indomitable black woman, long-suffering and oversexed. In a book about real and fictional black women, I wrote that the obsessive "man love" of Hannah, Sula's mother, was a stereotype. (At the time, I didn't see that Morrison's decision to burn her to death was a moral condemnation, not a melodrama.) Morrison is used to being challenged and isn't afraid to confront her critics. "I didn't like what you wrote," she said to me a few years ago. I was caught off guard, but she steered the conversation to another topic.

The reviews of "Sula"—like those of "The Bluest Eye"—were mixed. Writing in *The Nation*, the critic Jerry H. Bryant came closest to identifying the confusion: "Most of us have been conditioned to expect something else in black characters, especially black female characters—guiltless victims of brutal white men, yearning for a respectable life of middle-class security; whores driven to their profession by impossible condi-

tions; housekeepers exhausted by their work for lazy white women. We do not expect to see a fierceness bordering on the demonic."

After "Sula," Bob Gottlieb advised Morrison to move on. "'O.K.," I told her, 'that's perfect. As perfect as a sonnet,'" he recalled. "'You've done that, you don't have to do it again. Now you're free to open up more.'" She followed his advice with "Song of Solomon," a sprawling epic about a prosperous but tortured black family that drew comparisons to Gabriel García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude." As she turned her attention to history—taking on, in years to come, slavery, Reconstruction, the great migration, the Harlem Renaissance—writing began to occupy more of her time. "I went to Bob Bernstein twice," she told me. "Once, when I saw a house I wanted to buy. I didn't want to go through the whole black-woman thing—no man, no credit—and so I asked the company to get the mortgage for me. The second time was after 'Tar Baby' was published. I knew it was unorthodox, but I wanted to come into the office less. I was doing what the editors did—line editing—at home. It was such a waste of time to come in and drink coffee and gossip. So I started working one day a week. I'd get eighty letters done, stay until eight o'clock, but get my work done."

Eventually, she resigned. "The job at Random House was a life raft for her," Gottlieb recalled. "She had two sons and she was worried about losing that life preserver. After she published 'Tar Baby,' I said, 'Toni, you can depend on your writing to support you.'"

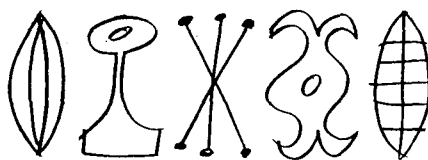
Morrison remembered Gottlieb's telling her, "O.K. You can write 'writer' on your tax returns."

Morrison provokes complicated responses from her literary progeny. She is routinely placed on a pedestal and just as frequently knocked off it. Black writers alternately praise her and castigate her for not being everything at once. With the deaths of Wright and

Baldwin, Morrison became both mother and father to black writers of my generation—a delicate situation. (It's similar to the phenomenon James Baldwin noted in his essay on Richard Wright: "His work was an immense liberation and revelation for me. He became my ally and my witness, and alas! my father.") She spoke through her characters when we wanted her to speak to us. With every book, she loomed larger, and gave us more opportunities to define ourselves against her. In 1978, "Song of Solomon" won the National Book Critics Circle Award, beating out Joan Didion's "A Book of Common Prayer" and John Cheever's "Falconer." It was chosen as a main selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club—the first by a black since Wright's "Native Son." When "Tar Baby" came out, four years later, Morrison was on the cover of *Newsweek*, the first black woman to appear on the cover of a national magazine since Zora Neale Hurston in 1943.

"Beloved," too, was an instant sensation in 1987. It told the story of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who murders her child rather than allow it to be captured. When "Beloved" failed to be nominated for a National Book Award (Pete Dexter's "Paris Trout" won that year), forty-eight prominent black intellectuals and writers, including Maya Angelou, Lucille Clifton, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alice Walker, and Quincy Troupe, protested "against such oversight and harmful whimsy" in a statement that was printed in the *Times Book Review*. "Alive, we write this testament of thanks to you, dear Toni: alive, beloved and persevering, magical. . . . For all America, for all of American letters, you have advanced the moral and artistic standards by which we must measure the daring and the love of our national imagination and our collective intelligence as a people." They contested the fact that Morrison had yet to be considered for a Pulitzer Prize. Later that year, "Beloved" did win a Pulitzer. Ralph Ellison, for one, disapproved of the special pleading. "Toni doesn't need that kind of support, even though it was well intentioned," he said.

"Beloved" 's profile only got higher as time went by. The contrarian critic Stanley Crouch called it "protest pulp fiction" and complained that it idealized



black behavior “to placate sentimental feminist ideology, and to make sure that the vision of black woman as the most scorned and rebuked of the victims doesn’t weaken.” He objected to its commerciality. “Were ‘Beloved’ adapted for television (which would suit the crass obviousness that wins out over Morrison’s literary gift at every significant turn) the trailer might go like this: ‘Meet Sethe, an ex-slave woman who harbors a deep and terrible secret that has brought terror into her home.’” (As it happened, it was adapted for film, with Oprah in the role of Sethe.)

Best-selling books, film adaptations, television talk-show appearances all increased Morrison’s celebrity and drew other famous people into her life. The actor Marlon Brando would phone to read her passages from her novels that he found particularly humorous. Oprah had her to dinner—on

TV. By the time the film of “Beloved” was released, Morrison’s fame was inescapable. I recall walking along the West Side piers in Manhattan and hearing a Puerto Rican queen, defending one of her “children,” say to an opponent, “You want me to go ‘Beloved’ on your ass?”

Morrison’s critics reached their loudest pitch when she was awarded the Nobel Prize, in 1993, a year that Thomas Pynchon and Joyce Carol Oates had been favored to win. “I hope this prize inspires her to write better books,” Crouch said. Charles Johnson, a black novelist, called her writing “often offensive, harsh. Whites are portrayed badly. Men are. Black men are.” He said that she had been “the beneficiary of good will” and that her award was “a triumph of political correctness.” A piece in the *Washington Post* asked well-known American writers whom they would like to see receive the award. Erica Jong (whose choice, Doris Lessing, Jong described as “the wrong kind of African: white”) wrote, “I wish that Toni Morrison, a bedazzling writer and a great human being, had won her prize only for her excellence at stringing words together. But I am nevertheless delighted at her choice. . . .



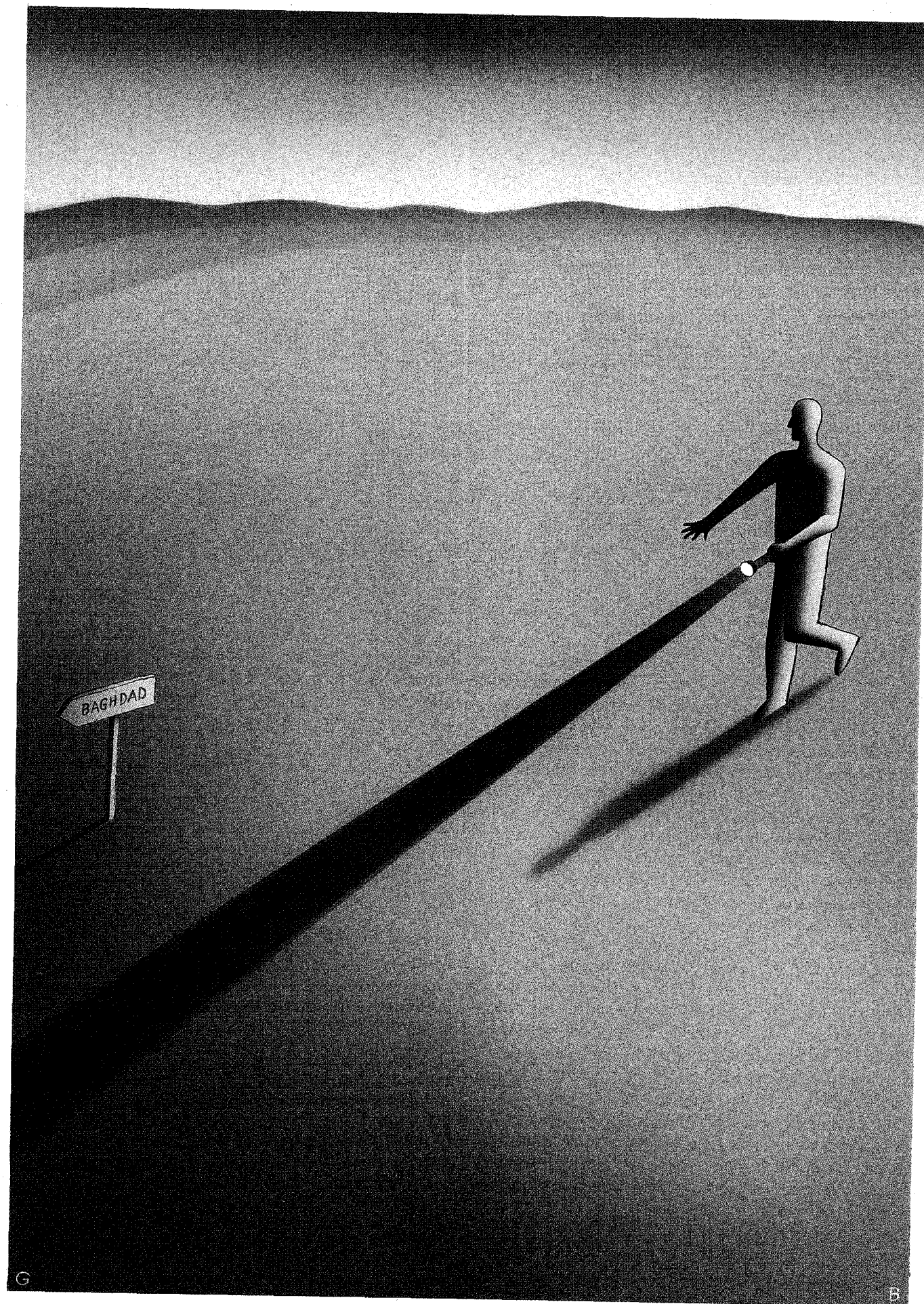
“You may believe you’ve been overcharged, but, remember, you’re overmedicated.”

I suspect, however, that her prize was not motivated solely by artistic considerations. Why can’t art in itself be enough? Must we also use the artist as a token of progressivism?” The Nobel Committee said that Morrison “delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race.” To this, one critic retorted that she has “erected an insistent awareness of race (and gender and whatever else may be the ‘identity’-defining trait du jour) as the defining feature of the self.”

“I have never competed with other people,” Morrison told me. “It just never occurred to me. I have to sort of work it up to understand what people are talking about when they complain about what this person did or that person shouldn’t do. There were several contenders from the U.S. that year, and my wish was that they would’ve all gotten it, so that I could be left alone. I only compete with myself, with my standards. How to do better the next time, how to work well.”

Near the end of one of our interviews last summer, Morrison took me on a tour of the house. Descending the staircase off the sitting room,

we had a look at her office, with its two big desks stacked with paper and correspondence. Behind one desk was her assistant, John Hoppenthaler, a poet. Windows surrounded the room. “I don’t really write that much in here,” Morrison said. “Don’t look at it—it’s a mess.” She decided that she would pick some tomatoes for lunch. She is what she calls a “pot” gardener—she enjoys gardening on a small scale. The room below the office is where Morrison does her writing. It has a slate floor, a big wooden table—“It’s from Norway, not that I got it in Norway, and I’m sure the man who imported it overcharged for it, but I love all the grooves and cracks in it”—and a fully equipped kitchen. Sometimes she cooks Thanksgiving dinner for her family there (both sons are married, with children), but it’s a room meant for work. French doors lead out to a stretch of grass and the river beyond. Morrison got to work picking tomatoes off a small vine trained against a stone wall. Two tomatoes that did not meet her standards she chucked into the river. Then she led me inside to get back to work. ♦



THE STOVEPIPE

How conflicts between the Bush Administration and the intelligence community marred the reporting on Iraq's weapons.

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

Since midsummer, the Senate Intelligence Committee has been attempting to solve the biggest mystery of the Iraq war: the disparity between the Bush Administration's prewar assessment of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and what has actually been discovered.

The committee is concentrating on the last ten years' worth of reports by the C.I.A. Preliminary findings, one intelligence official told me, are disquieting. "The intelligence community made all kinds of errors and handled things sloppily," he said. The problems range from a lack of quality control to different agencies' reporting contradictory assessments at the same time. One finding, the official went on, was that the intelligence reports about Iraq provided by the United Nations inspection teams and the International Atomic Energy Agency, which monitored Iraq's nuclear-weapons programs, were far more accurate than the C.I.A. estimates. "Some of the old-timers in the community are appalled by how bad the analysis was," the official said. "If you look at them side by side, C.I.A. versus United Nations, the U.N. agencies come out ahead across the board."

There were, of course, good reasons to worry about Saddam Hussein's possession of W.M.D.s. He had manufactured and used chemical weapons in the past, and had experimented with biological weapons; before the first Gulf War, he maintained a multibillion-dollar nuclear-weapons program. In addition, there were widespread doubts about the efficacy of the U.N. inspection teams, whose operations in Iraq were repeatedly challenged and disrupted by Saddam Hussein. Iraq was thought to have manufactured at least six thousand more chemical weapons than the U.N. could account for. And yet, as some former U.N. inspectors often predicted, the tons of

chemical and biological weapons that the American public was led to expect have thus far proved illusory. As long as that remains the case, one question will be asked more and more insistently: How did the American intelligence community get it so wrong?

Part of the answer lies in decisions made early in the Bush Administration, before the events of September 11, 2001. In interviews with present and former intelligence officials, I was told that some senior Administration people, soon after coming to power, had bypassed the government's customary procedures for vetting intelligence.

A retired C.I.A. officer described for me some of the questions that would normally arise in vetting: "Does dramatic information turned up by an overseas spy square with his access, or does it exceed his plausible reach? How does the agent behave? Is he on time for meetings?" The vetting process is especially important when one is dealing with foreign-agent reports—sensitive intelligence that can trigger profound policy decisions. In theory, no request for action should be taken directly to higher authorities—a process known as "stovepiping"—without the information on which it is based having been subjected to rigorous scrutiny.

The point is not that the President and his senior aides were consciously lying. What was taking place was much more systematic—and potentially just as troublesome. Kenneth Pollack, a former National Security Council expert on Iraq, whose book *"The Threatening Storm"* generally supported the use of force to remove Saddam Hussein, told me that what the Bush people did was "dismantle the existing filtering process that for fifty years had been preventing the policymakers from getting bad information. They created stovepipes to get the infor-

mation they wanted directly to the top leadership. Their position is that the professional bureaucracy is deliberately and maliciously keeping information from them.

"They always had information to back up their public claims, but it was often very bad information," Pollack continued. "They were forcing the intelligence community to defend its good information and good analysis so aggressively that the intelligence analysts didn't have the time or the energy to go after the bad information."

The Administration eventually got its way, a former C.I.A. official said. "The analysts at the C.I.A. were beaten down defending their assessments. And they blame George Tenet"—the C.I.A. director—"for not protecting them. I've never seen a government like this."

A few months after George Bush took office, Greg Thielmann, an expert on disarmament with the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, or INR, was assigned to be the daily intelligence liaison to John Bolton, the Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control, who is a prominent conservative. Thielmann understood that his posting had been mandated by Secretary of State Colin Powell, who thought that every important State Department bureau should be assigned a daily intelligence officer. "Bolton was the guy with whom I had to do business," Thielmann said. "We were going to provide him with all the information he was entitled to see. That's what being a professional intelligence officer is all about."

But, Thielmann told me, "Bolton seemed to be troubled because INR was not telling him what he wanted to hear." Thielmann soon found himself shut out of Bolton's early-morning staff meetings. "I was intercepted at the door of his office

"There's so much intelligence out there that it's easy to pick and choose your case," a former aide to Vice-President Cheney said.

and told, "The Under-Secretary doesn't need you to attend this meeting anymore." When Thielmann protested that he was there to provide intelligence input, the aide said, "The Under-Secretary wants to keep this in the family."

Eventually, Thielmann said, Bolton demanded that he and his staff have direct electronic access to sensitive intelligence, such as foreign-agent reports and electronic intercepts. In previous Administrations, such data had been made available to under-secretaries only after it was analyzed, usually in the specially secured offices of INR. The whole point of the intelligence system in place, according to Thielmann, was "to prevent raw intelligence from getting to people who would be misled." Bolton, however, wanted his aides to receive and assign intelligence analyses and assessments using the raw data. In essence, the Under-Secretary would be running his own intelligence operation, without any guidance or support. "He surrounded himself with a hand-chosen group of loyalists, and found a way to get C.I.A. information directly," Thielmann said.

In a subsequent interview, Bolton acknowledged that he had changed the procedures for handling intelligence, in an effort to extend the scope of the classified materials available to his office. "I found that there was lots of stuff that I wasn't getting and that the INR analysts weren't including," he told me. "I didn't want it filtered. I wanted to see everything—to be fully informed. If that puts someone's nose out of joint, sorry about that." Bolton told me that he wanted to reach out to the intelligence community but that Thielmann had "invited himself" to his daily staff meetings. "This was my meeting with the four assistant secretaries who report to me, in preparation for the Secretary's 8:30 A.M. staff meeting," Bolton said. "This was within my family of bureaus. There was no place for INR or anyone else—the Human Resources Bureau or the Office of Foreign Buildings."

There was also a change in procedure at the Pentagon under Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Douglas Feith, the Under-Secretary for Policy. In the early summer of 2001, a career official assigned to a Pentagon planning office undertook a routine evaluation of the assumption, adopted by

APPALACHIAN FAREWELL

Sunset in Appalachia, bituminous bulwark
Against the western skydrop.
An Advent of gold and green, an Easter of ashes.

If night is our last address,
This is the place we moved from,
Backs on fire, our futures hard-edged and sure to arrive.

These are the towns our lives abandoned,
Wind in our faces,
The idea of incident like a box beside us on the Trailways' seat.

And where were we headed for?
The country of Narrative, that dark territory
Which spells out our stories in sentences, which gives them an end
and beginning . . .

Goddess of Bad Roads and Inclement Weather, take down
Our names, remember us in the drip
And thaw of the wintry mix, remember us when the light cools.

Help us never to get above our raising, help us
To hold hard to what was there,
Orebank and Reedy Creek, Surgoinsville down the line.

—Charles Wright

Wolfowitz and Feith, that the Iraqi National Congress, an exile group headed by Ahmad Chalabi, could play a major role in a coup d'état to oust Saddam Hussein. They also assumed that Chalabi, after the coup, would be welcomed by Iraqis as a hero.

An official familiar with the evaluation described how it subjected that scenario to the principle of what planners call "branches and sequels"—that is, "plan for what you expect not to happen." The official said, "It was a 'what could go wrong' study. What if it turns out that Ahmad Chalabi is not so popular? What's Plan B if you discover that Chalabi and his boys don't have it in them to accomplish the overthrow?"

The people in the policy offices didn't seem to care. When the official asked about the analysis, he was told by a colleague that the new Pentagon leadership wanted to focus not on what could go wrong but on what would go right. He was told that the study's exploration of options amounted to planning for failure. "Their methodology was analogous

to tossing a coin five times and assuming that it would always come up heads," the official told me. "You need to think about what would happen if it comes up tails."

Getting rid of Saddam Hussein and his regime had been a priority for Wolfowitz and others in and around the Administration since the end of the first Gulf War. For years, Iraq hawks had seen a coup led by Chalabi as the best means of achieving that goal. After September 11th, however, and the military's quick victory in Afghanistan, the notion of a coup gave way to the idea of an American invasion.

In a speech on November 14, 2001, as the Taliban were being routed in Afghanistan, Richard Perle, a Pentagon consultant with long-standing ties to Wolfowitz, Feith, and Chalabi, articulated what would become the Bush Administration's most compelling argument for going to war with Iraq: the possibility that, with enough time, Saddam Hussein would be capable of attacking

the United States with a nuclear weapon. Perle cited testimony from Dr. Khidhir Hamza, an Iraqi defector, who declared that Saddam Hussein, in response to the 1981 Israeli bombing of the Osiraq nuclear reactor, near Baghdad, had ordered future nuclear facilities to be dispersed at four hundred sites across the nation. "Every day," Perle said, these sites "turn out a little bit of nuclear materials." He told his audience, "Do we wait for Saddam and hope for the best, do we wait and hope he doesn't do what we know he is capable of . . . or do we take some preemptive action?"

In fact, the best case for the success of the U.N. inspection process in Iraq was in the area of nuclear arms. In October, 1997, the International Atomic Energy Agency issued a definitive report declaring Iraq to be essentially free of nuclear weapons. The I.A.E.A.'s inspectors said, "There are no indications that there remains in Iraq any physical capability for the production of amounts of weaponisable nuclear material of any practical significance." The report noted that Iraq's nuclear facilities had been destroyed by American bombs in the 1991 Gulf War.

The study's main author, Garry Dillon, a British nuclear-safety engineer who spent twenty-three years working for the I.A.E.A. and retired as its chief of inspection, told me that it was "highly unlikely" that Iraq had been able to maintain a secret or hidden program to produce significant amounts of weaponsusable material, given the enormous progress in the past decade in the technical ability of I.A.E.A. inspectors to detect radioactivity in ground locations and in waterways. "This is not kitchen chemistry," Dillon said. "You're talking factory scale, and in any operation there are leaks."

The Administration could offer little or no recent firsthand intelligence to contradict the I.A.E.A.'s 1997 conclusions. During the Clinton years, there had been a constant flow of troubling intelligence reports on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, but most were in the context of worst-case analyses—what Iraq could do without adequate United Nations inspections—and included few, if any, reliable reports from agents inside the country. The inspectors left in 1998. Many of the new reports that the

Bush people were receiving came from defectors who had managed to flee Iraq with help from the Iraqi National Congress. The defectors gave dramatic accounts of Iraq's efforts to reconstitute its nuclear-weapons program, and of its alleged production of chemical and biological weapons—but the accounts could not be corroborated by the available intelligence.

Greg Thielmann, after being turned away from Bolton's office, worked with the INR staff on a major review of Iraq's progress in developing W.M.D.s. The review, presented to Secretary of State Powell in December, 2001, echoed the earlier I.A.E.A. findings. According to Thielmann, "It basically said that there is no persuasive evidence that the Iraqi nuclear program is being reconstituted."

The defectors, however, had an audience prepared to believe the worst. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had long complained about the limits of American intelligence. In the late nineteen-nineties, for example, he had chaired a commission on ballistic-missile programs that criticized the unwillingness of intelligence analysts "to make estimates that extended beyond the hard evidence they had in hand." After he became Secretary of Defense, a separate intelligence unit was set up in the Pentagon's policy office, under the control of William Luti, a senior aide to Feith. This office, which circumvented the usual procedures of vetting and transparency, stovepiped many of its findings to the highest-ranking officials.

In the fall of 2001, soon after the September 11th attacks, the C.I.A. received an intelligence report from Italy's Military Intelligence and Security Service, or SISMI, about a public visit that Wissam al-Zahawie, then the Iraqi Ambassador to the Vatican, had made to Niger and three other African nations two and a half years earlier, in February, 1999. The visit had been covered at the time by the local press in Niger and by a French press agency. The American Am-

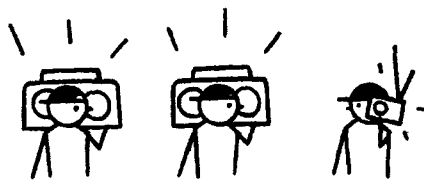
bassador, Charles O. Cecil, filed a routine report to Washington on the visit, as did British intelligence. There was nothing untoward about the Zahawie visit. "We reported it because his picture appeared in the paper with the President," Cecil, who is now retired, told me. There was no article accompanying the photograph, only the caption, and nothing significant to report. At the time, Niger, which had sent hundreds of troops in support of the American-led Gulf War in 1991, was actively seeking economic assistance from the United States.

None of the contemporaneous reports, as far as is known, made any mention of uranium. But now, apparently as part of a larger search for any pertinent information about terrorism, SISMI dug the Zahawie-trip report out of its files and passed it along, with a suggestion that Zahawie's real mission was to arrange the purchase of a form of uranium ore known as "yellowcake." (Yellowcake, which has been a major Niger export for decades, can be used to make fuel for nuclear reactors. It can also be converted, if processed differently, into weapons-grade uranium.)

What made the two-and-a-half-year-old report stand out in Washington was its relative freshness. A 1999 attempt by Iraq to buy uranium ore, if verified, would seem to prove that Saddam had been working to reconstitute his nuclear program—and give the lie to the I.A.E.A. and to intelligence reports inside the American government that claimed otherwise.

The SISMI report, however, was unpersuasive. Inside the American intelligence community, it was dismissed as amateurish and unsubstantiated. One former senior C.I.A. official told me that the initial report from Italy contained no documents but only a written summary of allegations. "I can fully believe that SISMI would put out a piece of intelligence like that," a C.I.A. consultant told me, "but why anybody would put credibility in it is beyond me." No credible documents have emerged since to corroborate it.

The intelligence report was quickly stovepiped to those officials who had an intense interest in building the case against Iraq, including Vice-President Dick Cheney. "The Vice-President saw a piece of intelligence reporting that



Niger was attempting to buy uranium," Cathie Martin, the spokeswoman for Cheney, told me. Sometime after he first saw it, Cheney brought it up at his regularly scheduled daily briefing from the C.I.A., Martin said. "He asked the briefer a question. The briefer came back a day or two later and said, 'We do have a report, but there's a lack of details.'" The Vice-President was further told that it was known that Iraq had acquired uranium ore from Niger in the early nineteen-eighties but that that material had been placed in secure storage by the I.A.E.A., which was monitoring it. "End of story," Martin added. "That's all we know." According to a former high-level C.I.A. official, however, Cheney was dissatisfied with the initial response, and asked the agency to review the matter once again. It was the beginning of what turned out to be a year-long tug-of-war between the C.I.A. and the Vice-President's office.

As the campaign against Iraq intensified, a former aide to Cheney told me, the Vice-President's office, run by his chief of staff, Lewis (Scooter) Libby, became increasingly secretive when it came to intelligence about Iraq's W.M.D.s. As with Wolfowitz and Bolton, there was a reluctance to let the military and civilian analysts on the staff vet intelligence.

"It was an unbelievably closed and small group," the former aide told me. Intelligence procedures were far more open during the Clinton Administration, he said, and professional staff members had been far more involved in assessing and evaluating the most sensitive data. "There's so much intelligence out there that it's easy to pick and choose your case," the former aide told me. "It opens things up to cherry-picking." ("Some reporting is sufficiently sensitive that it is restricted only to the very top officials of the government—as it should be," Cathie Martin said. And any restrictions, she added, emanate from C.I.A. security requirements.)

By early 2002, the SISMI intelligence—still unverified—had begun to play a role in the Administration's warnings about the Iraqi nuclear threat. On January 30th, the C.I.A. published an unclassified report to Congress that stated, "Baghdad may be attempting to acquire materials that could aid in reconstituting its nuclear-weapons pro-

gram." A week later, Colin Powell told the House International Relations Committee, "With respect to the nuclear program, there is no doubt that the Iraqis are pursuing it."

The C.I.A. assessment reflected both deep divisions within the agency and the position of its director, George Tenet, which was far from secure. (The agency had been sharply criticized, after all, for failing to provide any effective warning of the September 11th attacks.) In the view of many C.I.A. analysts and operatives, the director was too eager to endear himself to the Administration hawks and improve his standing with the President and the Vice-President. Senior C.I.A. analysts dealing with Iraq were constantly being urged by the Vice-President's office to provide worst-case assessments on Iraqi weapons issues. "They got pounded on, day after day," one senior Bush Administration official told me, and received no consistent backup from Tenet and his senior staff. "Pretty soon you say 'Fuck it.'" And they began to provide the intelligence that was wanted.

In late February, the C.I.A. persuaded retired Ambassador Joseph Wilson to fly to Niger to discreetly check out the story of the uranium sale. Wilson, who is now a business consultant, had excellent credentials: he had been deputy chief of mission in Baghdad, had served as a diplomat in Africa, and had worked in the White House for the National Security Council. He was known as an independent diplomat who had put himself in harm's way to help American citizens abroad.

Wilson told me he was informed at the time that the mission had come about because the Vice-President's office was interested in the Italian intelligence report. Before his departure, he was summoned to a meeting at the C.I.A. with a group of government experts on Iraq, Niger, and uranium. He was shown no documents but was told, he said, that

the C.I.A. "was responding to a report that was recently received of a purported memorandum of agreement"—between Iraq and Niger—"that our boys had gotten." He added, "It was never clear to me, or to the people who were briefing me, whether our guys had actually seen the agreement, or the purported text of an agreement." Wilson's trip to Niger, which lasted eight days, produced nothing. He learned that any memorandum of understanding to sell yellowcake would have required the signatures of Niger's Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Minister of Mines. "I saw everybody out there," Wilson said, and no one had signed such a document. "If a document purporting to be about the sale contained those signatures, it would not be authentic." Wilson also learned that there was no uranium available to sell: it had all been pre-sold to Niger's Japanese and European consortium partners.

Wilson returned to Washington and made his report. It was circulated, he said, but "I heard nothing about what the Vice-President's office thought about it." (In response, Cathie Martin said, "The Vice-President doesn't know Joe Wilson and did not know about his trip until he read about it in the press." The first press accounts appeared fifteen months after Wilson's trip.)

By early March, 2002, a former White House official told me, it was understood by many in the White House that the President had decided, in his own mind, to go to war. The undeclared decision had a devastating impact on the continuing struggle against terrorism. The Bush Administration took many intelligence operations that had been aimed at Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups around the world and redirected them to the Persian Gulf. Linguists and special operatives were abruptly reassigned, and several ongoing anti-terrorism intelligence programs were curtailed.

Chalabi's defector reports were now flowing from the Pentagon directly to the Vice-President's office, and then on to the President, with little prior evaluation by intelligence professionals. When INR analysts did get a look at the reports, they were troubled by what they found. "They'd pick apart a report and find out that the source had been wrong before, or



had no access to the information provided," Greg Thielmann told me. "There was considerable skepticism throughout the intelligence community about the reliability of Chalabi's sources, but the defector reports were coming all the time. Knock one down and another comes along. Meanwhile, the garbage was being shoved straight to the President."

A routine settled in: the Pentagon's defector reports, classified "secret," would be funnelled to newspapers, but subsequent C.I.A. and INR analyses of the reports—invariably scathing but also classified—would remain secret.

"It became a personality issue," a Pentagon consultant said of the Bush Administration's handling of intelligence. "My fact is better than your fact. The whole thing is a failure of process. Nobody goes to primary sources." The intelligence community was in full retreat.

In the spring of 2002, the former White House official told me, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz began urging the President to release more than ninety million dollars in federal funds to Chalabi. The 1998 Iraq Liberation Act had authorized ninety-seven million dollars for the Iraqi opposition, but most of the funds had not been expended. The State Department opposed releasing the rest of the money, arguing that Chalabi had failed to account properly for the funds he had already received. "The Vice-President came into a meeting furious that we hadn't given the money to Chalabi," the former official recalled. Cheney said, "Here we are, denying him money, when they"—the Iraqi National Congress—"are providing us with unique intelligence on Iraqi W.M.D.s."

In late summer, the White House sharply escalated the nuclear rhetoric. There were at least two immediate targets: the midterm congressional elections and the pending vote on a congressional resolution authorizing the President to take any action he deemed necessary in Iraq, to protect America's national security.



"His body washed up in the tub."

On August 7th, Vice-President Cheney, speaking in California, said of Saddam Hussein, "What we know now, from various sources, is that he . . . continues to pursue a nuclear weapon." On August 26th, Cheney suggested that Saddam had a nuclear capability that could directly threaten "anyone he chooses, in his own region or beyond." He added that the Iraqis were continuing "to pursue the nuclear program they began so many years ago." On September 8th, he told a television interviewer, "We do know, with absolute certainty, that he is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon." The President himself, in his weekly radio address on September 14th, stated, "Saddam Hussein has the scientists and infrastructure for a nuclear-weapons program, and has illicitly sought to purchase the equipment needed to enrich uranium for a nuclear weapon." There was no confirmed intelligence for the President's assertion.

The government of the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, President Bush's

closest ally, was also brought in. As Blair later told a British government inquiry, he and Bush had talked by telephone that summer about the need "to disclose what we knew or as much as we could of what we knew." Blair loyally took the lead: on September 24th, the British government issued a dossier dramatizing the W.M.D. threat posed by Iraq. In a foreword, Blair proclaimed that "the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt that Saddam . . . continues in his efforts to develop nuclear weapons." The dossier noted that intelligence—based, again, largely on the SISMI report—showed that Iraq had "sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." A subsequent parliamentary inquiry determined that the published statement had been significantly toned down after the C.I.A. warned its British counterpart not to include the claim in the dossier, and in the final version Niger was not named, nor was SISMI.

The White House, meanwhile, had been escalating its rhetoric. In a television interview on September 8th, Con-

doleezza Rice, the national-security adviser, addressing questions about the strength of the Administration's case against Iraq, said, "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud"—a formulation that was taken up by hawks in the Administration. And, in a speech on October 7th, President Bush said, "Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud."

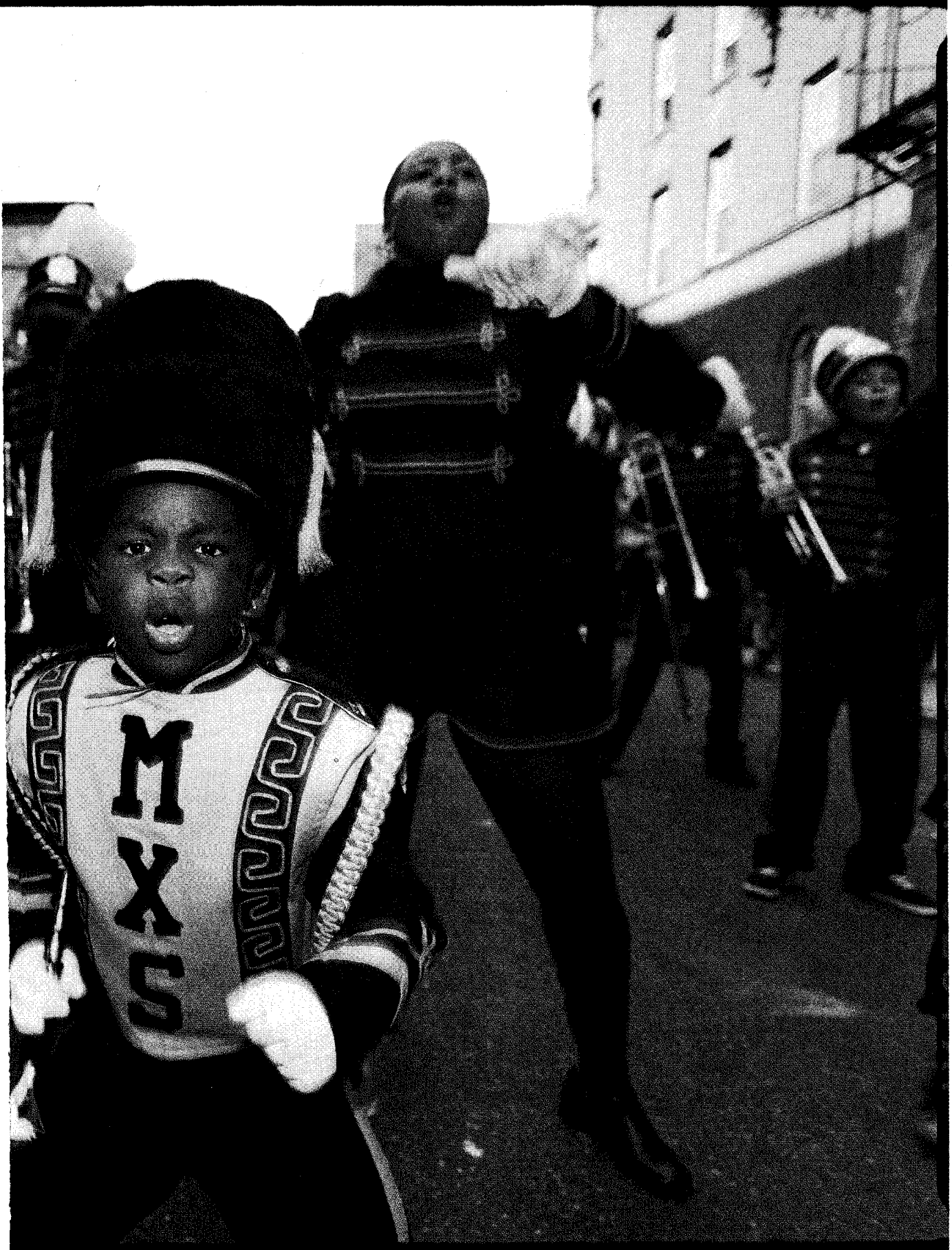
At that moment, in early October, 2002, a set of documents suddenly appeared that promised to provide solid evidence that Iraq was attempting to reconstitute its nuclear program. The first notice of the documents' existence came when Elisabetta Burba, a reporter for *Panorama*, a glossy Italian weekly owned by the publishing empire of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, received a telephone call from an Italian businessman and security consultant whom she believed to have once been connected to Italian intelligence. He told her that he had information connecting Saddam Hussein to the purchase of uranium in Africa. She considered the informant credible. In 1995, when she worked for the magazine *Epoca*, he had provided her with detailed information, apparently from Western intelligence sources, for articles she published dealing with the peace process in Bosnia and with an Islamic charity that was linked to international terrorism. The information, some of it in English, proved to be accurate. *Epoca* had authorized her to pay around four thousand dollars for the documents—a common journalistic practice in Italy.

Now, years later, "he comes to me again," Burba told me. "I knew he was an informed person, and that he had contacts all over the world, including in the Middle East. He deals with investment and security issues." When Burba met with the man, he showed her the Niger documents and offered to sell them to her for about ten thousand dollars.

The documents he gave her were photocopies. There were twenty-two pages, mostly in French, some with the letterhead of the Niger government or Embassy, and two on the stationery of the Iraqi Embassy to the Holy See.



LITTLE MAJOR Keyshawn Mayo, seven, a drum major in the Malcolm X Shabazz H.



100th Marching Band, preparing for the African-American Day Parade in Manhattan. Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark.

There were also telexes. When Burba asked how the documents could be authenticated, the man produced what appeared to be a photocopy of the codebook from the Niger Embassy, along with other items. "What I was sure of was that he had access," Burba said. "He didn't receive the documents from the moon."

The documents dealt primarily with the alleged sale of uranium, Burba said. She informed her editors, and shared the photocopies with them. She wanted to arrange a visit to Niger to verify what seemed to be an astonishing story. At that point, however, *Panorama's* editor-in-chief, Carlo Rossella, who is known for his ties to the Berlusconi government, told Burba to turn the documents over to the American Embassy for authentication. Burba dutifully took a copy of the papers to the Embassy on October 9th.

A week later, Burba travelled to Niger. She visited mines and the ports that any exports would pass through, spoke to European businessmen and

officials informed about Niger's uranium industry, and found no trace of a sale. She also learned that the transport company and the bank mentioned in the papers were too small and too ill-equipped to handle such a transaction. As Ambassador Wilson had done eight months earlier, she concluded that there was no evidence of a recent sale of yellowcake to Iraq. The *Panorama* story was dead, and Burba and her editors said that no money was paid. The documents, however, were now in American hands.

Two former C.I.A. officials provided slightly different accounts of what happened next. "The Embassy was alerted that the papers were coming," the first former official told me, "and it passed them directly to Washington without even vetting them inside the Embassy." Once the documents were in Washington, they were forwarded by the C.I.A. to the Pentagon, he said. "Everybody knew at every step of the way that they were false—until they got to the Pentagon, where they were believed."

The documents were just what Administration hawks had been waiting for. The second former official, Vincent Cannistraro, who served as chief of counter-terrorism operations and analysis, told me that copies of the Burba documents were given to the American Embassy, which passed them on to the C.I.A.'s chief of station in Rome, who forwarded them to Washington. Months later, he said, he telephoned a contact at C.I.A. headquarters and was told that "the jury was still out on this"—that is, on the authenticity of the documents.

George Tenet clearly was ambivalent about the information: in early October, he intervened to prevent the President from referring to Niger in a speech in Cincinnati. But Tenet then seemed to give up the fight, and Saddam's desire for uranium from Niger soon became part of the Administration's public case for going to war.

On December 7th, the Iraqi regime provided the U.N. Security Council with a twelve-thousand-page series of documents in which it denied having a W.M.D. arsenal. Very few in the press, the public, or the White House believed it, and a State Department rebuttal, on December 19th, asked, "Why is the Iraqi regime hiding their Niger procurement?" It was the first time that Niger had been publicly identified. In a January 23rd Op-Ed column in the *Times*, entitled "Why We Know Iraq Is Lying," Condoleezza Rice wrote that the "false declaration . . . fails to account for or explain Iraq's efforts to get uranium from abroad." On January 26th, Secretary Powell, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, asked, "Why is Iraq still trying to procure uranium?" Two days later, President Bush described the alleged sale in his State of the Union address, saying, "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

Who produced the fake Niger papers? There is nothing approaching a consensus on this question within the intelligence community. There has been published speculation about the intelligence services of several different countries. One theory, favored by some

THE THREE LAWS OF PEN-O-DYNAMICS



R. CW

journalists in Rome, is that SISMI produced the false documents and passed them to *Panorama* for publication.

Another explanation was provided by a former senior C.I.A. officer. He had begun talking to me about the Niger papers in March, when I first wrote about the forgery, and said, "Somebody deliberately let something false get in there." He became more forthcoming in subsequent months, eventually saying that a small group of disgruntled retired C.I.A. clandestine operators had banded together in the late summer of last year and drafted the fraudulent documents themselves.

"The agency guys were so pissed at Cheney," the former officer said. "They said, 'O.K., we're going to put the bite on these guys.'" My source said that he was first told of the fabrication late last year, at one of the many holiday gatherings in the Washington area of past and present C.I.A. officials. "Everyone was bragging about it—'Here's what we did. It was cool, cool, cool.'" These retirees, he said, had superb contacts among current officers in the agency and were informed in detail of the SISMI intelligence.

"They thought that, with this crowd, it was the only way to go—to nail these guys who were not practicing good trade-craft and vetting intelligence," my source said. "They thought it'd be bought at lower levels—a big bluff." The thinking, he said, was that the documents would be endorsed by Iraq hawks at the top of the Bush Administration, who would be unable to resist flaunting them at a press conference or an interagency government meeting. They would then look foolish when intelligence officials pointed out that they were obvious fakes. But the tactic backfired, he said, when the papers won widespread acceptance within the Administration. "It got out of control."

Like all large institutions, C.I.A. headquarters, in Langley, Virginia, is full of water-cooler gossip, and a retired clandestine officer told me this summer that the story about a former operations officer faking the documents is making the rounds. "What's telling," he added, "is that the story, whether it's true or not, is believed"—an extraordinary commentary on the level of mistrust, bitterness, and demoralization within the C.I.A. under the Bush

Administration. (William Harlow, the C.I.A. spokesman, said that the agency had no more evidence that former members of the C.I.A. had forged the documents "than we have that they were forged by Mr. Hersh.")

The F.B.I. has been investigating the forgery at the request of the Senate Intelligence Committee. A senior F.B.I. official told me that the possibility that the documents were falsified by someone inside the American intelligence community had not been ruled out. "This story could go several directions," he said. "We haven't gotten anything solid, and we've looked." He said that the F.B.I. agents assigned to the case are putting a great deal of effort into the investigation. But "somebody's hiding something, and they're hiding it pretty well."

President Bush's State of the Union speech had startled Elisabetta Burba, the Italian reporter. She had been handed documents and had personally taken them to the American Embassy, and she now knew from her trip to Niger that they were false. Later, Burba revisited her source. "I wanted to know what happened," she said. "He told me that he didn't know the documents were false, and said he'd also been fooled."

Burba, convinced that she had the story of the year, wanted to publish her account immediately after the President's speech, but Carlo Rossella, *Panorama's* editor-in-chief, decided against it. Rossella explained to me, "When I heard the State of the Union statement, I thought to myself that perhaps the United States government has other information. I didn't think the documents were that important—they weren't trustworthy." Eventually, in July, after her name appeared in the press, Burba published an account of her role. She told me that she was interviewed at the American consulate in Milan by three agents for the F.B.I. in early September.

The State of the Union speech was confounding to many members of the intelligence community, who could not understand how such intelligence could have got to the President without vetting. The former intelligence official who gave me the account of the forging of the documents told me that his col-

leagues were also startled by the speech. "They said, 'Holy shit, all of a sudden the President is talking about it in the State of the Union address!'" They began to panic. Who the hell was going to expose it? They had to build a backfire. The solution was to leak the documents to the I.A.E.A."

I subsequently met with a group of senior I.A.E.A. officials in Vienna, where the organization has its headquarters. In an interview over dinner, they told me that they did not even know the papers existed until early February of this year, a few days after the President's speech. The I.A.E.A. had been asking Washington and London for their evidence of Iraq's pursuit of African uranium, without receiving any response, ever since the previous September, when word of it turned up in the British dossier. After Niger was specified in the State Department's fact sheet of December 19, 2002, the I.A.E.A. became more insistent. "I started to harass the United States," recalled Jacques Baute, a Frenchman who, as director of the I.A.E.A.'s Iraq Nuclear Verification Office, often harassed Washington. Mark Gwozdecky, the I.A.E.A.'s spokesman, added, "We were asking for actionable evidence, and Jacques was getting almost nothing."

On February 4, 2003, while Baute was on a plane bound for New York to attend a United Nations Security Council meeting on the Iraqi weapons dispute, the U.S. Mission in Vienna suddenly briefed members of Baute's team on the Niger papers, but still declined to hand over the documents. "I insisted on seeing the documents myself," Baute said, "and was provided with them upon my arrival in New York." The next day, Secretary Powell made his case for going to war against Iraq before the U.N. Security Council. The presentation did not mention Niger—a fact that did not escape Baute. I.A.E.A. officials told me that they were puzzled by the timing of the American decision to provide the documents. Baute quickly concluded that they were fake.

Over the next few weeks, I.A.E.A. officials conducted further investigations, which confirmed the fraud. They also got in touch with American and British officials to inform them of the findings, and give them a chance to respond. Nothing





"Pardon us, Harrison, if the board fails to share your enthusiasm for the foliage up in Darien."

was forthcoming, and so the I.A.E.A.'s director-general, Mohamed ElBaradei, publicly described the fraud at his next scheduled briefing to the U.N. Security Council, in New York on March 7th. The story slowly began to unravel.

Vice-President Cheney responded to ElBaradei's report mainly by attacking the messenger. On March 16th, Cheney, appearing on "Meet the Press," stated emphatically that the United States had reason to believe that Saddam Hussein had reconstituted his nuclear-weapons program. He went on, "I think Mr. ElBaradei frankly is wrong. And I think if you look at the track record of the International Atomic Energy Agency on this kind of issue, especially where Iraq's concerned, they have consistently underestimated or missed what it was Saddam Hussein was doing. I don't have any reason to believe they're any more valid this time than they've been in the past." Three days later, the war in Iraq got under way, and the tale of the African-uranium-connection forgery sank from view.

Joseph Wilson, the diplomat who had travelled to Africa to investigate the allegation more than a year earlier, revived the Niger story. He was angered by what he saw as the White House's

dishonesty about Niger, and in early May he casually mentioned his mission to Niger, and his findings, during a brief talk about Iraq at a political conference in suburban Washington sponsored by the Senate Democratic Policy Committee (Wilson is a Democrat). Another speaker at the conference was the *Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, who got Wilson's permission to mention the Niger trip in a column. A few months later, on July 6th, Wilson wrote about the trip himself on the *Times* Op-Ed page. "I gave them months to correct the record," he told me, speaking of the White House, "but they kept on lying."

The White House responded by blaming the intelligence community for the Niger reference in the State of the Union address. Condoleezza Rice, the national-security adviser, told a television interviewer on July 13th, "Had there been even a peep that the agency did not want that sentence in or that George Tenet did not want that sentence . . . it would have been gone." Five days later, a senior White House official went a step further, telling reporters at a background briefing that they had the wrong impression about Joseph Wilson's trip to Niger and the information it had yielded. "You can't draw a conclusion

that we were warned by Ambassador Wilson that this was all dubious," the unnamed official said, according to a White House transcript. "It's just not accurate."

But Wilson's account of his trip forced a rattled White House to acknowledge, for the first time, that "this information should not have risen to the level of a Presidential speech." It also triggered retaliatory leaks to the press by White House officials that exposed Wilson's wife as a C.I.A. operative—and led to an F.B.I. investigation.

Among the best potential witnesses on the subject of Iraq's actual nuclear capabilities are the men and women who worked in the Iraqi weapons industry and for the National Monitoring Directorate, the agency set up by Saddam to work with the United Nations and I.A.E.A. inspectors. Many of the most senior weapons-industry officials, even those who voluntarily surrendered to U.S. forces, are being held in captivity at the Baghdad airport and other places, away from reporters. Their families have been told little by American authorities. Desperate for information, they have been calling friends and other contacts in America for help.

One Iraqi émigré who has heard from the scientists' families is Shakir al Kha Fagi, who left Iraq as a young man and runs a successful business in the Detroit area. "The people in intelligence and in the W.M.D. business are in jail," he said. "The Americans are hunting them down one by one. Nobody speaks for them, and there's no American lawyer who will take the case."

Not all the senior scientists are in captivity, however. Jafar Dhia Jafar, a British-educated physicist who coordinated Iraq's efforts to make the bomb in the nineteen-eighties, and who had direct access to Saddam Hussein, fled Iraq in early April, before Baghdad fell, and, with the help of his brother, Hamid, the managing director of a large energy company, made his way to the United Arab Emirates. Jafar has refused to return to Baghdad, but he agreed to be debriefed by C.I.A. and British intelligence agents. There were some twenty meetings, involving as many as fifteen American and British experts. The first meeting, on April 11th, began with an

urgent question from a C.I.A. officer: "Does Iraq have a nuclear device? The military really want to know. They are extremely worried." Jafar's response, according to the notes of an eyewitness, was to laugh. The notes continued:

Jafar insisted that there was not only no bomb, but no W.M.D., period. "The answer was none." . . . Jafar explained that the Iraqi leadership had set up a new committee after the 91 Gulf war, and after the UNSCOM [United Nations] inspection process was set up. . . and the following instructions [were sent] from the Top Man [Saddam]—"give them everything."

The notes said that Jafar was then asked, "But this doesn't mean all W.M.D.? How can you be certain?" His answer was clear: "I know all the scientists involved, and they chat. There is no W.M.D."

Jafar explained why Saddam had decided to give up his valued weapons:

Up until the 91 Gulf war, our adversaries were regional. . . . But after the war, when it was clear that we were up against the United States, Saddam understood that these weapons were redundant. "No way we could escape the United States." Therefore, the W.M.D. warheads did Iraq little strategic good.

Jafar had his own explanation, according to the notes, for one of the enduring mysteries of the U.N. inspection process—the six-thousand-warhead discrepancy between the number of chemical weapons thought to have been manufactured by Iraq before 1991 and the number that were accounted for by the U.N. inspection teams. It was this discrepancy which led Western intelligence officials and military planners to make the worst-case assumptions. Jafar told his interrogators that the Iraqi government had simply lied to the United Nations about the number of chemical weapons used against Iran during the brutal Iran-Iraq war in the nineteen-eighties. Iraq, he said, dropped thousands more warheads on the Iranians than it acknowledged. For that reason, Saddam preferred not to account for the weapons at all.

There are always credibility problems with witnesses from a defeated regime, and anyone involved in the creation or concealment of W.M.D.s. would have a motive to deny it. But a strong endorsement of Jafar's integrity came from an unusual source—Jacques Baute, of the I.A.E.A., who spent much of the past decade locked in a struggle with Jafar and the other W.M.D. scientists and techni-

cians of Iraq. "I don't believe anybody," Baute told me, "but, by and large, what he told us after 1995 was pretty accurate."

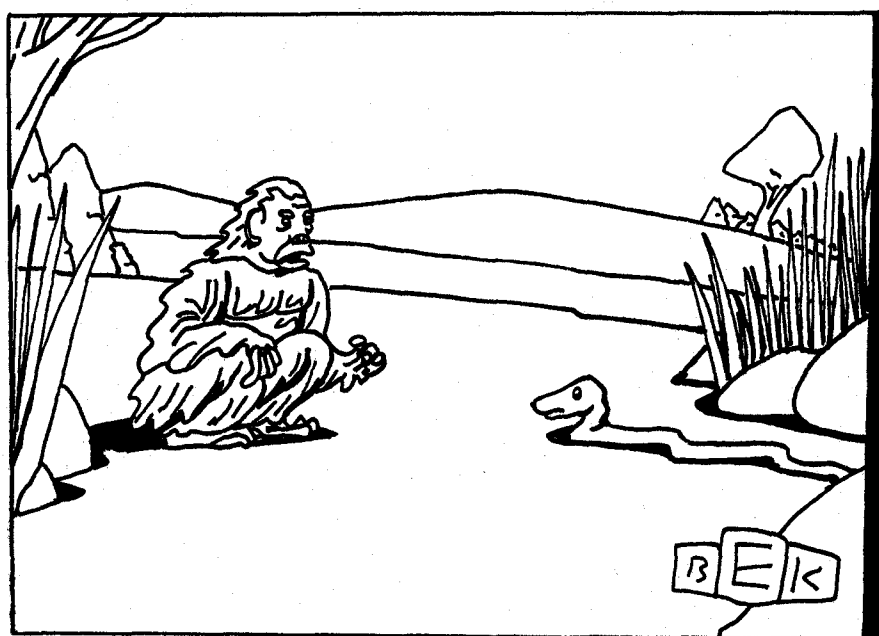
In early October, David Kay, the former U.N. inspector who is the head of the Administration's Iraq Survey Group, made his interim report to Congress on the status of the search for Iraq's W.M.D.s. "We have not yet found stocks of weapons," Kay reported, "but we are not yet at the point where we can say definitively either that such weapon stocks do not exist or that they existed before the war." In the area of nuclear weapons, Kay said, "Despite evidence of Saddam's continued ambition to acquire nuclear weapons, to date we have not uncovered evidence that Iraq undertook significant post-1998 steps to actually build nuclear weapons or produce fissile material." Kay was widely seen as having made the best case possible for President Bush's prewar claims of an imminent W.M.D. threat. But what he found fell far short of those claims, and the report was regarded as a blow to the Administration. President Bush, however, saw it differently. He told reporters that he felt vindicated by the report, in that it showed that "Saddam Hussein was a threat, a serious danger."

The President's response raises the question of what, if anything, the Administration learned from the failure, so far, to find significant quantities of W.M.D.s in Iraq. Any President depends heavily on

his staff for the vetting of intelligence and a reasonable summary and analysis of the world's day-to-day events. The ultimate authority in the White House for such issues lies with the President's national-security adviser—in this case, Condoleezza Rice. The former White House official told me, "Maybe the Secretary of Defense and his people are short-circuiting the process, and creating a separate channel to the Vice-President. Still, at the end of the day all the policies have to be hashed out in the interagency process, led by the national-security adviser." What happened instead, he said, "was a real abdication of responsibility by Condi."

Vice-President Cheney remains unabashed about the Administration's reliance on the Niger documents, despite the revelation of their forgery. In a September interview on "Meet the Press," Cheney claimed that the British dossier's charge that "Saddam was, in fact, trying to acquire uranium in Africa" had been "revalidated." Cheney went on, "So there may be a difference of opinion there. I don't know what the truth is on the ground. . . . I don't know Mr. Wilson. I probably shouldn't judge him."

The Vice-President also defended the way in which he had involved himself in intelligence matters: "This is a very important area. It's one that the President has asked me to work on. . . . In terms of asking questions, I plead guilty. I ask a hell of a lot of questions. That's my job." ♦

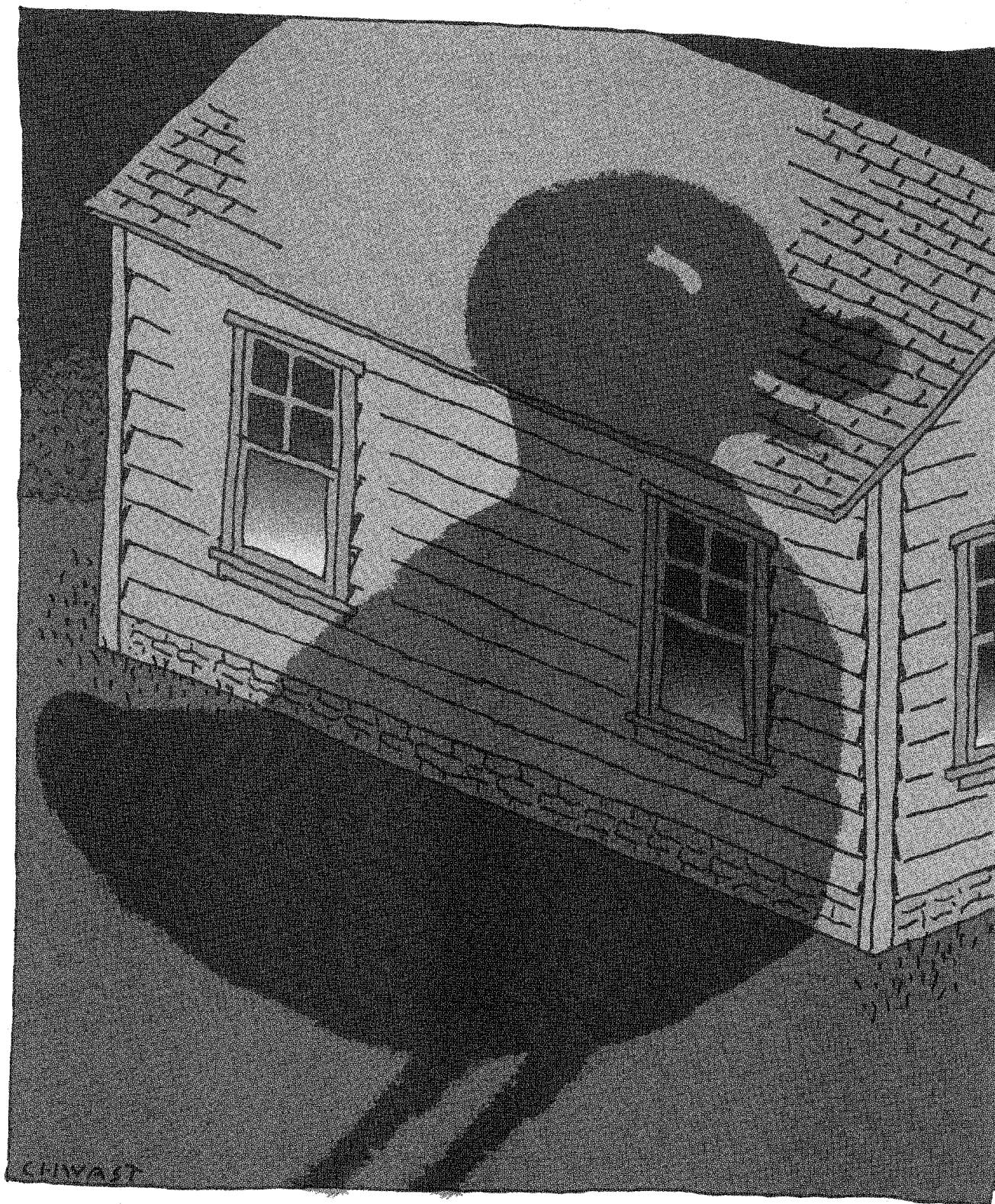


"I'm sorry—I'm totally blanking on your species."

FICTION

LOVE SNARES

BY LOUISE ERDRICH



A man finds happiness so fleetingly, like the petals melting off a prairie rose. Even as you touch the feeling, it dries up, leaving only the dust of the emotion, a powder of hope. That is how it happened with me. No sooner had Margaret and I found happiness together in our old age than our joy was disrupted. Our peace was shattered. Our love was challenged. My life's enemy, Shesheeb, returned to the reservation and set up his house down the road.

Nothing is complete without its shadow. Ever since the guns had sounded across the lake to mark his birth, Shesheeb had been my special foe. My mother said that when I heard those guns crack I cried and went stiff with rage in her arms. Even when we were babies, I believe he lay waiting in his cradleboard, his *tikinaagan*, to burn me. Or to whip me with a lash made of deerhide strips from his mother's tanning frame. For he did these things. While we were still small, he stood on the far edge of a slough in late fall, after a light dusting of snow, and called me across the ice with a frantic wave and cry so that I bounded onto the thin crust, skidding with alarm, and went through.

He was given to his aunt, Iron Sky, to raise. She was the one who made him take the charcoal, the burnt stick, the ashes, which were a sign for him to fast and find his vision and his spirit helpers. One morning, he darkened his face and went off into the woods to ask for help, but it didn't come. His aunt forced the charcoal on him again, and then again. Nothing. The last time she sent him out he was nearly dead when he returned. He staggered and dropped flat on the path. It was on that trip that something happened to him that we can't say, we don't know, we haven't a name for and don't want one.

When he came back he stared straight at everyone as if to capture or pierce. Only, if you returned his stare, as I dared to do, his eyes flickered away—flat, nerveless. He needed to get near people. He would not be alone, and glanced around in a constant, anxious way, as though he were being followed. What did he see? Form of the owl, flight soundless, a ruffled heart. Balls of crackling light. A man pacing swiftly with his head twisted backward on his neck. Two rabbits screaming from the same snare. Shesheeb dis-

covered cruelty. He cut the tongue from a slow porcupine and watched it stand in surprise at his feet, bleeding until it toppled. He laughed, and Iron Sky understood that to laugh at the pain of a harmless animal is the sign of a mind twisting in on itself. She sent him from her place, with her thoughts shut carefully on what he had become.

He wandered from one house to another, until he came to us. My family took him in for a short time, to our sorrow. I remember the sap was running when he got his name. My father wore two earrings, and as he bent over the boiling sap one fell off into the kettle. He didn't notice until the boy who was staying with us reached in to grab it. His hand plunged down. He let out a sly and greedy quack. The noise startled us. He made the sound again, looking at his boiled hand, the earring. *Quack!* And so Shesheeb was named for the black duck, greasy and sly.

How he got my sister to marry him, I don't know. For he grew up to look like a duck, fat and juicy, with a potbelly and a shovel-face and a bowlegged hunch. His laugh was still a sardonic quack, and he used it when he struck his young wife with a burning stick. The blow marked the side of my sister's lovely face with a knot of flesh that grew darker and darker until it swallowed her. Then came the winter of our last starvation, when she disappeared. I know what happened. The truth is this: Shesheeb went *wiindigoo*. That he killed and ate my sister was never proved in a white man's court, so he went free. But the rest of us knew.

We were snared in white men's laws by then. Pitfalls and loopholes. With a flare of ink in the capital city, rights were taken and given away. Attempting to keep what was left of our land was like walking through a landscape of webs. It dwindled until there wasn't enough to call a hunting territory. We were supposed to learn to farm the *zhaaganaash* way, using toothed machines and clumsy, big horses to pull them. And yet we'd only just grown used to the idea that we owned land at all—something that could not possibly belong to any human.

When the first of us failed at growing or herding or plowing the fields, we were told that we could sign a piece of paper and get money for the land, with-

out anyone taking it. Mortgage, this was called, a piece of banker's cleverness that sounded good to many. I spoke against this trick, but who listened to Nanapush? People signed the paper, got money, came home night after night full of whiskey and food. Suddenly the foreclosure notices were handed out and the land was barred. It belonged to someone else. And now, just when it appeared that our people would turn into a wandering bunch, Shesheeb was back. Since the first snow, he had settled in a little gray house that used to belong to Iron Sky. Crippled in one foot, he limped and duck-walked through the bush gathering black medicines. And from his front door, from wherever he could, the old dog tried to steal my Margaret.

It was Margaret's habit to take a short-cut across Shesheeb's land on her way to Mass. More than once, she returned with a report that he'd tried to waylay her with clever talk.

"You stay away from him today," I warned her as she put warm wrappings on her legs and bundled on her heaviest coat.

Margaret's gaze sharpened, and she smiled into her beaded drawstring bag, counting the coins she was so stingy with. She still possessed the mental fever that acted on me like a love charm. She blew hot, then cold, chilled me, scorched my fingers on those rare times that she welcomed my touch. Now her words were as playful as arrows.

"Shesheeb?" She made her voice falsely innocent. "He talks sweet to me when I pass by. I like the things he says."

I gripped the knob of my willow stick, thrust it hard at the swirling pattern of Margaret's floor. "What does the stringy old duck tell you?"

"He says I have a round cheek," she explained with pride. "I have a young walk, my legs look plump, my thighs sweet and tender."

"He's just hungry," I said. "Besides, I've heard the old prick's half blind."

Margaret kicked my cane from my hands. "That's the only stiff thing you own!" she said.

She puckered up her lips and me, her walk swift and firm. Shesheeb was right about her cheek and leg thighs, and I was wrong not to her that day. For as soon as she w



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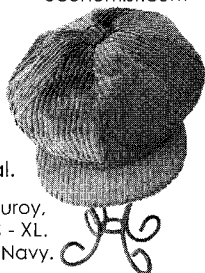
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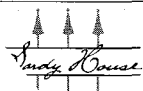
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I worried that he had got an answer from her, a glance from her eye that encouraged him, a pout from those lips which he would probably call juicy, though toward me they were set and stern. Maybe that, or maybe Shesheeb had done some darker work—hidden a love packet in the snow of the path she walked, a clipping of his hair and nails, the coughball of an owl. Stepping over it, perhaps Margaret had felt a hot breath along her neck, a Chinook wind flowing through her arms, her blood, an early spring. I could see it! Her thoughts melted and softened. She raised her basket and sang an old French tune. . . .

The time that she was gone to Mass lengthened and its passage seemed too slow. I tried singing. I tried chopping wood. I tried to distract myself by drumming and then by mudding the log sides of our cabin. When she finally returned, with the smell of incense in her clothes, I watched her with testing eyes. I thought that she looked too cheerful—in her cheeks wild roses flushed. *Winter Chinook, for sure*, I decided in an inner fury. He'd used his love ways, his bad old powers, on her, the black stare from under his eyebrows that was said to draw women to him like chaff to a knife.

That night, Margaret turned her back to me as we lay wrapped in our blankets. She knocked my hand off her breast, pressed her lips shut against my kiss. I couldn't sleep, so I was alert when in her dreams she mumbled something slow and soft that could have been his name. *Shesheeb!* Hearing that, I sprang up, my throat choked with poison, and went out the door. The night was deep, the wind dry and sharp. I breathed desperate draughts, sucking in the air. At last, a calmer spot cracked open deep in my heart, and I remembered my sister.

In the month of the year when the snow is rotten and the deer starve, Shesheeb had come to court my sister. She was as round as a prairie hen, with a surprised mouth, always laughing and curious. Her eyes were soft and wondering. Fifteen summers she had bobbed on the stalk of her family like a sweet blossom, unfolding her petals. Fifteen autumns had taught her to work hard, to put away all she could for the winter. Fifteen springs she had budded with tender inner life. But the year of Shesheeb would teach her more than I

know even now, when I have seen the four seasons go around fifty times and more. The mind of my sister was beautifully wound, a fine skein, a perfect spool. Shesheeb took hold of the end of the string and then, slowly, he unravelled her.

The next morning, my mind was still crowded with ghosts. But thinking of my sister had strengthened my heart. I would not be beaten, I decided. Not this time. I would save Margaret whether she liked it or not.

Margaret. She was my last love, and the most challenging of my life. We were meant to face death together, Margaret and I, for what else is love in old age? On those occasions when our animosity melted and turned golden, I brimmed with such comfort that death lost a portion of its power. I was an elder, the tribal chairman. Supposedly wise. Supposedly resigned to, familiar with, prepared for the end of my life. But the more I knew of death, the more I fought it. Margaret and I were alike that way—tough, slippery, shrewd, unrepentant, though of course she showed a different face to the priest.

I wanted Margaret. I wanted to make her eye spark, to make her turn toward me like a plant to the sun, a child to the drum. Trembling with an old man's desperation, I decided to make a love medicine, the most potent batch I'd ever concocted. But something worked against me. Something or someone.

There was a pack of dogs that roamed the reservation, sometimes vicious, sometimes craven, and always starving. Shesheeb's dog was the skinniest and saddest of them all. As I sat on the bench beside the door, working on my ingredients, the dogs hung around, watching me with careful eyes. I suppose that my grinding up roots, burning off the ends of hairs, and wetting and singeing leaves got their juices flowing, quickened their responses. I turned away from my work, went inside the house to fetch something. When I came back out I saw that Shesheeb's dog had leaped onto the stump in front of the bench where I'd put the tray of medicine and was licking up the powder.

"Awus!" I yelled and chased him off, but he'd been too quick for me. He'd eaten enough love powder for a war

party. No matter. I gathered up all my ingredients to make some more.

But, as I began again, a fury seized me, heating up the marrow of my bones. Never before had I needed medicine to snag my women. They had come to me! This humiliation was Shesheeb's fault, as was the anguish of my sister's death. I'd had enough of him, too much for a lifetime, I decided. Before I faced the shame of putting love powders on my old lady, I would go out hunting duck. I would find Shesheeb and kill him.

That day, my walk took me into the trading store to buy a good long length of wire for a snare. I put the wire on credit, which Margaret and I paid up as rarely as possible in the hope that if we did die we would go with a whopping bill. On the way home, I investigated all the paths that I thought Shesheeb might walk, creeping close enough to his place, his den, his lair of shame, to smell the burned grease of his cooking.

I didn't set my snare the first day. I didn't set it the second day, either. I waited and I thought, crept back to look for tracks and ascertain his habits. I finally settled on a slim trail near his house, a straight bit with a bend just beyond. A natural place to look up and pause, in case a bear might be coming around the corner. And, after looking, to step ahead freely. To brush through a fringe of leaves. In those leaves, the narrowest part, I would set the wire loop. But first I dug a shallow pan into the ground—here Shesheeb's toes would dance above the earth with a tantalizing desperation, twitch, die.

My heart flinches in me now when I think of the strict care I took. How I made sure that the noose would slip easily, shut lethally, squeeze, cut. How I calculated and removed all that his hands might clutch at and made the hole extra wide and deep. It was a good thing I calculated heavy—for his potbelly, his fat head, and his duck feet. Fortunate that the wind dropped a light branch across my trap.

For three days, nothing. The sky was bleak and gray. On day four, a wind stirred and blew the clouds off. I sat down on my little bench and let the sun hit me. The warmth baked my bones. I smelled the calm freshness of the rain

drying off the leaves. I let myself dream, as I do so often now, of the old days and the old people. I remembered my sister's gentle laugh, and felt the light touch of her fingers on my hair. Then a sound penetrated my fog of memory, a high-pitched and prolonged squeak, like the death yell of a rabbit.

As I ran through the woods, or, at least, hobbled as fast as my skinny legs would take me, the pitch grew higher, wilder, shaking me to the core, although I've hunted all my life and fought and seen men die in difficult ways. It was not a man, though, whose death rang through the leaves. Rounding the corner, I skidded to a halt in shock, for it was Margaret I had snared.

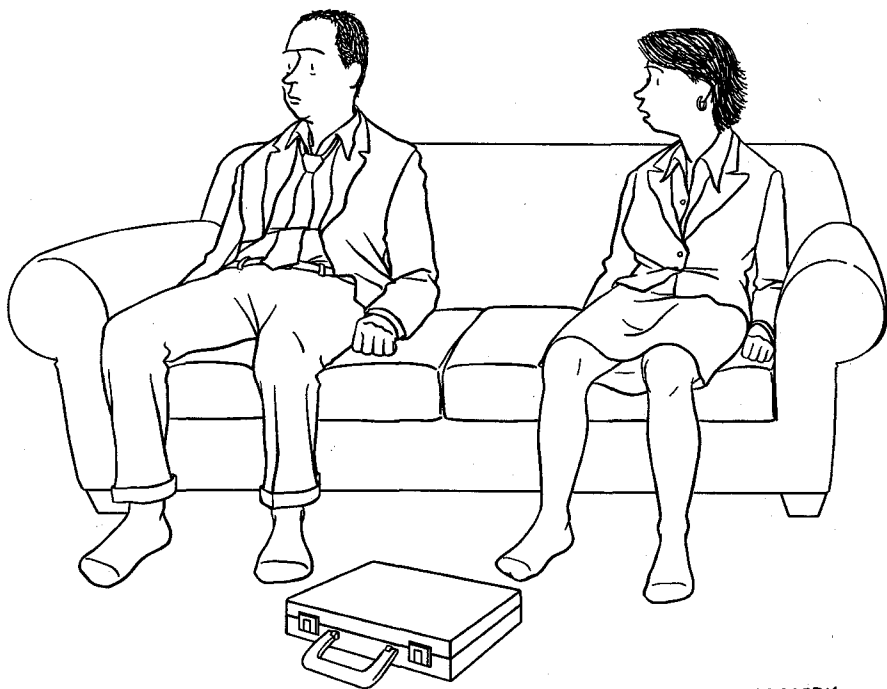
She strained on perfect tiptoe, like a *zhaaganaash* ballerina, on the flimsy branch that had fallen across the square I'd carved in the path. Her hands were up around her neck attempting to release the tightening wire. Her face was dark red. When she saw me she went silent. For the first time ever, I had her complete attention. Even in my horror, I was somehow gratified. She looked at me with such appeal that I would have done anything, changed places with her if I could. I threw myself down and crept forward, edging closer until I was crouched nearly underneath her. She un-

derstood my plan and stepped onto my back. Then I marshalled every bit of my strength and lifted her so that the wire loosened and she was able to pull it over her head. Once she was free, she fell, retching and gasping, beside me in the ditch.

Now that I had saved her, now that she was assured of life, I had only a few minutes in which to work on her logic. I could see no harm in assigning blame where it would be to my advantage. Therefore, as I scrambled for my walking stick, I cried out, "Shesheeb! Can't he stick to bad medicine? Must he also set snares all around his house?" Then I pounded the earth and vowed I would tear into him right away, crack his skull with my willow stick, beat him senseless for trying to snare my wife.

"Your wife?" Margaret said, rubbing her neck, tough-minded despite her near-death. "Even now I am holding out for a church wedding, old man, so we'll get to that wife part later. For now, quiet down. *Akiwenzii*, I have had a vision." She dragged me to her, grasped my jacket, spoke face to face in an earnest and serious voice. "*Bizindan*. Listen to me, Nanapush."

As we walked home together, both weak and giddy with relief, Margaret told me the substance of her revela-



GREGORY

"Well, we can eat out, order in, or just sit here and let our bodies slowly gnaw away at our muscle tissue."

tion. Many times we had to stop, for she spoke with great force, breathing hard. What she'd seen was no less than a spirit gift, a vision that could change her life and mine. I didn't know whether to be horrified or proud that I had caused it. I knew only that I should for once be quiet.

"As the dark closed in around me, as I choked, as I was near death," Margaret said, "here is what happened, old man. I saw my great-grandmother from the old days. You know the one. They used to call her Medicine Dress. In my vision she was young and strong. She wore her dress, the medicine dress that she was known for. And she told me its secret. That secret had died with her, but she was giving it to me now, she said, in order to save my life. Here is what she told me. Nothing upon that dress was ever touched by a human, much less a *chimookomaan*. It was sewn for her by the spirits, she said. Then she told me that I must sew my own dress, following the rules that she would set out. She said that once I had made this dress I would have great power. In this dress, I would be able to heal anyone. I'd see things. I'd know things beyond the reach of my mind. After she told me this, blackness closed around my eyes. I could see no longer. I experienced great sorrow, as I believed that I would die before I could create this healing dress. I was pierced by the wish to live, opened my eyes, and then saw you! Old man, you have saved me to outfit this vision, to make myself the medicine dress!"

Margaret's eyes widened and then softened to a deep maple color, and her gaze charmed me close. "Dear old man," she said softly, clasping my hand in hers as we reached our door. "You saved my life and made it possible for me to sew my vision. Let me show you my thanks."

Margaret slowly and methodically began to gather her materials. As she had said, nothing on the dress could be made by a white man, which was not easy, as *chimookomaanag* popped up everywhere—stole the land next door and put a farm on it, walked the town streets, even prayed in our missionizing church. She couldn't use glass beads to decorate her dress. As in the old days, she had to use deer clackers, teeth,

quills, and the bones of small birds. This required the painstaking hunting of those animals, which I did with a good will, hoping that my efforts might redeem me from the terrible mistake of the snare. *Binewag* sat juicy in the comfort of the tree branches. I knew how to catch them with a wire hooked to the top of a long pole. Plucked and roasted, the birds were sweet and tender. I also let it be known that I was collecting these bird bones, and would be glad to clean up the remnants of partridges cooked throughout the reservation.

These were good times. These were the sorts of jobs I liked—catching food, visiting around, eating roast partridge. Whenever I returned with a load of quills or bones, Margaret rewarded me in ways I can only dream of now. I wanted nothing but the happiness of falling asleep in her arms, craved only the calm discriminations of old-age *manaa*. I wanted us to live in love until we faded into the next world, worn smooth by the rubbing of skin on skin.

If only Margaret's son, Nector, hadn't come home that year, things would perhaps have gone on forever in that pleasant dream. But there he was one afternoon, sitting on a rock beside the door eating bannock. Margaret beamed down on him like the moon.

Nector was smart, and all the girls admired his looks. It was my task to keep him from falling prey to vanity—an uncle's responsibility.

"All that *manaa* you're having is making you thin," I said. "The bones are poking through your skin. Most unattractive."

"Only one bone counts"—he glanced down—"with women."

"More like a rope," I said, critical. "A short little piece."

"Yours is." Nector laughed, stuffing a huge grease-covered chunk of *pak-wezhigan* into his mouth.



"Neither one of you has much to brag of," Margaret said, sitting down with us. "Women come to you out of pity." But she smiled at me from the corner of her eye to let me know that this was not the case. My heart swelled up, and I experienced a collision of desires. First, I wanted to make the moment last with Margaret, in the hope that it would lead to other things. She had been generous two nights before. Would my luck hold out? Second, I wanted to go on teasing Nector, for his own good. Third, what was it? I couldn't remember. An old man's thoughts fly in and out of his head. Oh, yes. There was something I had to avoid. Like a treacherous rock, it could tear the bottom of my boat. But I couldn't recall in that moment exactly what I was trying to avoid, and so, like someone trying to steer away, I instead was drawn right to it.

"You're pretty good at snaring women," I said to Nector, "but you can't keep them, I hear."

As soon as I said the word, I remembered with a jolt of panic, *snare, snare, snare!* Immediately, my brain spun. I tried to throw down a distracting piece of nonsense about the famous quality of Margaret's bannock, but Nector had already seized on the word I feared.

"Snaring?" He began to laugh.

"I can't hold myself back!" I cried, lunging over him. "I must have yet another piece of this bread. Old woman, you have a way with your cooking—"

"—that snares you every time," Nector said. "That reminds me—"

"*Ohweeh!*" I cried out and fell upon the ground, as though unconscious, and began to writhe and moan. Nector and Margaret seemed to find in my agony a source of humor.

"Look how the old man pretends he's poisoned. Very funny. He does this all the time," Margaret said fondly.

"He's a sly one," Nector said, approving of me, too. "So good with a snare, he could snare a deer. He could snare anything or anyone! Remember how he used to snare..." He stopped and looked uncertainly at Margaret, whose mouth had dropped open and then slowly shut to a thinking line.

Silence. I waited for her blows to fall upon me where I lay, but she did nothing, which made me even more

STEAM REASSURES HIM

My husband is watching me iron.
Steam reassures him. The hiss of starch
The probing slide around each button of his shirt
Speaks to him of Solway Street in Pittsburgh.

As for me, the wicker basket is a reproach.
There is last summer's nightgown,
And several awkward round tablecloths
Which refuse to lie flat.

My house specializes in these challenges.
Bags of mail I did not ask to receive
Choke the floor of my linen closet.
A photograph of me, holding a baby on a beach.
But which beach and, for that matter, which baby?
A Japanese chest whose bottom drawer has irresponsibly locked itself,
And who can remember where I put the key?

That night, waiting for sleep, I whisper,
I did only trivial things today.
And he asks, Why aren't you painting?

—Elizabeth Pierson Friend
(1933–2003)

afraid. I opened my eyes a crack, and my terror was confirmed. From the set of her mouth and the flash in her eyes, I knew that she understood all and was reserving punishment. Mere browbeating, tongue-lashing, ass-kicking, and starvation of an old man would not be enough. She gave a chilly little grin, rose, and turned her back on the two of us.

"It is time for me to rest my old bones," I said in despair. Then I crawled into a corner of the house and burrowed under a heap of blankets. I covered my face, bit my tongue, and turned to the wall.

So I had snared her. She would snare me right back. We both knew that she was doing it and both of us knew why, but neither of us had the courage to dismantle the barrier of hard sticks and pointed words that soon tangled like deep bush between us. I knew that she had divined the true prey of the snare I'd set and had decided to resurrect my jealousy. Although I was aware of her ploy, I couldn't keep the thorns of her words from piercing deep.

One night, she hummed in an irritating manner, under her breath. "*Niimoshenb,*"

she finally let me hear her singing, "sweet-heart, little duck, speak softly, for my old man will hear you creeping underneath my blanket."

Of course, after that I tossed all night, at each little noise, imagining the greasy old duck sneaking into our cabin. Now that she slept across the room from me, such a thing was remotely possible. I began to sleep by the door, but then I feared the window. The upshot was that I got no sleep at all.

She boasted of the old duck's hunting skills, and how he always had fresh game—*waarwaashkeshi* or *mooz*. "Never gopher! Never things I've seen you eat!"

"What would you know? You never cook for me anymore." I tried to make myself meek and pitiful. "You'll come home from Mass one day and find me dried up in the corner, starved to death."

"Go snare something then," she said, heartless.

She walked out laughing at me, came back with bird bones for her dress. I didn't ask her where she'd got them, only if I could help her dye them red with the bark of speckled alder I'd gathered in atonement.

"You?" She looked at me and sniffed, as though I were covered with *moh*. "You might interfere with the dress's healing properties."

This cut me deeper than anything she'd said so far, and I let myself be naked in my speech.

"I've got nothing in my heart but love for you."

"Nothing in your pants, either."

With a cruel laugh, she sat against the shady side of the cabin to work on her dress, which was almost finished. I must admit, she'd done a good job on it. The dress was made of a moose hide that she'd pounded and stretched and rubbed to a velvet softness. She'd used raspberry leaf and root dyes to color the bird bones, and, unlike the harsh, bright glare of the trader's beads, these soft pinks and purples put roses in the woman's cheeks. I said so.

"Don't touch" was all she said. "My roses have pickers so long they could pierce your heart and kill you."

I crept close to her, thinking that maybe the medicine dress would do its healing work and bring us together, but the opposite happened.

"My, my." She clucked her tongue, her eyes sparkling with malicious fire. "I'm dizzy. That old man down the road gave me a sip of wine!"

There comes a time when you reach the last bitter drop your gullet can hold. That was it. I'd had enough.

She wanted wine? I'd get her wine. I knew where Sister Hildegard Ann kept the parish communion wine in the convent cellar, which opened from a side door with a flimsy bolt. I'd steal a whole cask, I decided, and bring it back to our cabin. I'd have a party with my sweetheart, and our love would be just like old times. We'd have a bush dance for just the two of us!

Once I made town, I visited around, chewed snuff, and killed time until it was dark, then crept close to the convent. Crouched beneath an open window, I heard the nuns say their nightly prayers. "God comfort you, my daughters," I whispered as they doused their lamps and made their way to their lonely cells. "And may you all get laid."

After I had pronounced my blessing, I waited until they slept and then I went to the cellar door and used a splinter of

partridge bone jammed in the crack between the door and the frame to ease the bolt from its casing. It didn't take long. The cool, winy air rushed at my face as I hefted a little wooden keg onto my shoulder and set off for home.

It had been a very long time since I'd tasted wine. In my youth it had made me foolish, stolen my brain, and left a bannock between my ears. Drink had caused me to sing and gamble, to fight, to chase women who belonged to other men. Liquor had not got the best of my life, but I knew well its evil powers. And yet, at that moment, all I could think of was its delights. The sour and delicious fumes exuding from the keg made my mouth water. The air was heavy and growing heavier. I set the cask down and took a rest beside the road. If I had a drink, I thought, my load would be one drink lighter.

The wine went down easy. The keg went back up slow. A familiar warmth burned in my gut and then swirled up around my heart. The moon was just bright enough for me to make out the road. As I walked on, the warm thrill of wine reached my tongue and untied it. I found myself singing an old love song. *You are paddling away, my sweetheart. But I will come after you. Marry me tonight.* Into my thoughts came pictures of the happiness that Margaret and I would feel once we'd put aside our game of revenge. That jealous game had run away with us, and then it had turned around and run over us. Flattened us good.

The keg grew heavy again. I stopped on the road and took a drink to lighten it, and then another, and then perhaps one too many, for I stumbled as I set off once more. At one point, near dawn, I woke to find myself curled up around my friend, the keg, right in the middle of the road. I took another drink. By then the cask was so light that I had no trouble reaching the cabin. Margaret greeted me at the doorway. Her look was foul.

"I was up all night, worried! I thought a bear got you!"

"Ah." I put the wine cask down and covered my heart with the palms of my hands, overcome. "My love! You worried about me?"

She regarded the keg suspiciously. "What did you bring, *akiwenzii*?"

"That is a peace offering," I said. "It is wine. You told me the black duck tried a sip of wine to win your womanly favors. I thought I'd do him one better and offer you a cask . . . or most of it."

Margaret looked down at the keg, frowning, then kicked it. It rolled, nearly empty. "Most of it?" she said. She shook her head and hid, perhaps, a little smile.

I poured a tin cup full and offered it to her. For a moment, she looked tempted, and then she knocked the cup out of my hands. "Your damn keg's nearly empty! You drank it all!" I retrieved the cup midair—a drunk is capable of such tricks—and downed it in one defiant gulp without a drop spilled.

"I'm a medicine dancer, according to my dream," Margaret said, standing as proud and straight as her old bones would allow. "I won't take the *ishkode-waaboo*, old man." But she had seen the lengths to which I was willing to go to win her favor, and much of her anger toward me seemed to have dissolved. Perhaps the dress had helped, too. She had been working on it when I arrived, and now she held it up against her—a soft, dun-colored, plum-beaded, old-time dress. Finished.

"Put it on," I urged. "Let me see you in it!"

I leaned back against a tree and watched as she shook off her old cotton *majigoode*, stood a moment in only her shift. Carefully, she lowered the new medicine dress onto herself and then stalked inside to fetch her eagle fan from its strap on the wall. While she was in there, she braided her hair and painted two black dots at the corners of her eyes. Then she emerged from the cabin and stood regal and queenly before me. I had to lower myself to sit against the tree or I would have fallen over from the simple beauty of the shock. Margaret. Rushes Bear. Granddaughter of old Medicine Dress. My love. She looked like a woman from a dream, a spirit lady, an *ogichidaa ikwe*. Tears stung my eyes, and I overflowed and wept.

"My precious sweetheart, are you a vision?"

"Of sorts," Margaret said, carried away a little herself.

If we had stopped right there, we would have ended up happy together

for the day and on into the night. But my guardian spirits weren't with me. My love luck failed. Because, once I told her I would sing for her, once I fetched the drum and she started to dance, Margaret ruined the effect. Though the dress was magnificent, my lady love was barely competent.

"I guess I never saw you dance before," I mumbled, surprised and dizzied by her bobbing missteps.

"Sure you have," Margaret said. "Many times. As you remember, I was head female dancer years ago."

"*Mii nange*," I mumbled, not sure of anything. "You're tipping!"

"You're tipping, old *shkwebii*." She was irritated. "You can't see straight."

But she was wrong. There were two of her, but both were hopping around in as miserable a crow step as a white woman. It hurt to watch.

"*Dagasanaa*, please," I asked her very gently, as careful with my words as I could be, "let me put on the dress and show you how to do it!"

She stopped dancing with a jerk, drove her hands to her hips, and glared. She puffed out her cheeks and looked as though she might explode in a cloud of bird-bone beads and tattered *bashkwegin*. Then she suddenly laughed, harsh and mean. "I'd love to see you in a dress, old crazy. The medicine is strong in this one. Maybe it will sober you up!"

"I don't care about that, lady love," I said to her in my most sincere voice. "I just want to make sure you don't make a fool of yourself."

At that, she almost ripped the dress off her body.

"Here." She thrust it at me. "You be the fool!"

She was outraged, I knew it, but I thought to win her over with my patient instruction. I put on the dress and started easily, keeping to the beat with what I thought was wondrous perfection. My steps were subtle. I moved like water. I could feel how well I floated around on the grass of the yard, and then I lost myself in the beat, although the drum had stopped. I could feel her eyes upon me, full of unwilling admiration. But when I chanced to look around at last I found that I was quite alone. She was gone. I was miserably wounded, but only for a second, and in the next instant my suspicions grabbed



me. Off to Shesheeb's, no doubt! I started through the bush, intending to have it out with him at last.

The leaves grew thick. Roots tripped me. Raspberry pickers scratched my arms, but I held to my path and eventually found the clearing around the little house that had once belonged to Iron Sky. Shesheeb hadn't kept the place up at all. The roof was sagging. The yard was a mess of garbage. A thread of smoke twisted in the still air. My heart squeezed—was he inside the house with Margaret? I was just about to rush the cabin when the door opened and the old man emerged alone, hunched over, groping his way into the sun. He turned his face up to the light, squinting.

So this was Shesheeb. Well, he was not much! Where was his power? His medicine? I made a small movement, and he turned his head. His hearing, at least, was very keen.

Since I was already discovered, I stepped forward and presented myself before him. There were no words I needed to say. There was no message. I stood still in the sun and allowed him to examine me with what eyesight he had, to recognize me, and in so doing recognize his crime. I waited. He blinked his white eyes, opaque and cloudy with cataracts. His face had collapsed around his nose. His nostrils quivered, his chin strained toward me as he tried to sense what he could. His rag of white hair hung to his waist, and his pants were held up by rope. He was nothing to look at. He didn't even have shoes on, so I could see that his feet were filthy clawed things, splayed and frightening. I could not imagine what Margaret saw in him—in fact, it was now clear that she'd only been trying to pique my jealousy all along.

"Who are you?" Shesheeb asked, at last. "You beauty, have you come to tempt me?"

I stepped back, startled, as you can imagine. I had entirely forgotten, in my examination of the old man, that I was dressed as an attractive woman. But now I had an idea. I'd get the old fake to fall in love with me. I'd torture his heart! I'd make him beg for my attentions, then abandon him and have a good laugh with Margaret.

I didn't dare use my voice. "Ahhh,"

I sighed. Just a little sigh, like some wind caught in the branches. He stepped closer. His nose twitched back and forth.

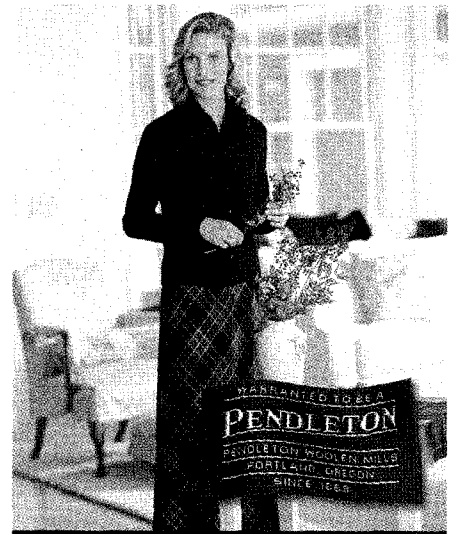
"*Piindigen!* Come into my cabin and have a cup of tea with me," he cried. "There's a chill in the air today."

"Mmmm," I crooned. I had to agree with him. Tea sounded just the thing.

Inside, the place was chaos. Piles of junk everywhere. Bones in one corner, rags in another. No place to sit and barely room to stand. There was a mashed old iron pot on top of the stove with some oily tea in it. This Shesheeb tried to heat up. Next to the pot was a can with scum at the bottom, soup maybe. His supper, no doubt. I couldn't help but gloat and, in my gloating, wonder at my luck in holding on to a woman who kept things comfortable for me, cooked my food, and never let my tea grow cold and unpleasant like the tea that Shesheeb gave me now. I took a drink. Though it was only half warmed up, still the tea seemed to fill my bones with a hot, blooming sensation. I finished the stuff and then, in spite of myself, I wanted more. Which was when it hit me. *He'd hit me.* Shesheeb had medicined me and I'd fallen for it! He was smiling now, just a hint of a smile, private and knowing. I was suddenly sure that he knew exactly who I was and had planned this moment. Perhaps he had even drawn me to him through the woods. Though blind and decrepit, he still had power.

He picked up a hand drum with knowing authority. "May I play a little song for you?" he said, his voice a slippery whine. Without waiting for my answer, he struck the drum. "*Niimin,*" he ordered. Against my will, I began to dance, just as he had directed. Quietly, with even movements, in exact time with the drum and the strange song he sang, I bobbed in the shadowy mess of Shesheeb's cabin. I tried to stop myself, to still my legs, to make my feet heavy. But I could not, and the movement of my body soon filled me with horror as nothing else had ever done. I was quickly becoming exhausted, too, reeling from the wine and the long stumble back from town. Still my feet rose and my legs trod. I knew that if I danced much longer my old heart would burst. Bright spots shifted across my vision, pain shot through my lungs.

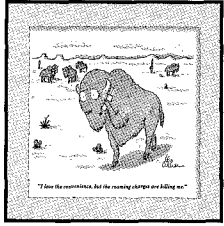
And then Shesheeb's dog bounded



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"He's running late this morning. He unexpectedly snapped out of denial."

in to greet its master. With a cry, almost of fear, he tried to shoo it out. It had been a good while since I had medicined that dog by accident, but now, to my surprise, Shesheeb became flustered by its presence. The old duck beat the drum a little faster. The dog grovelled and licked his knee. He tried to kick it away, but my love powder was too strong. The dog fell into a sudden passion, hunkered over, and began to make love to Shesheeb's shin with a vicious ardor that cared not for sharp words or strikes. That dog humped away like the devil and broke Shesheeb's rhythm with its thrusts. Released, I pushed past the old medicine man and staggered into the freedom of the yard and then the woods, for I did not even pause but plunged forward in a stupor of relief until I reached the main road.

There I stopped. Which way to turn, home or town? Either way, what was there for me now but more shame and misery?

I headed for town and slept the afternoon and night away in the cemetery. I'd eluded Shesheeb, but not his tea, which knocked me out. The next morning, the Pukwans, who dug graves for

twenty-five cents a hole, came and found me laid out cold. A dipper of water splashed in my face, and I clenched my eyes shut. Another dipper of water stung me.

"Enough!" I put my hand up and struggled to sit. I was hampered, it seemed, by a sheet wound around my legs.

"Come look at the *mindimooyenh*," one Pukwan yelled to the other.

I staggered to my feet and tried to walk.

"How did this woman's dress get on me, my brothers?" I asked the Pukwans, sincerely puzzled.

"You pulled it over your fat head," one said. Then, with relish, he added, "Do you know what today is?"

"Today," I said, thinking as quickly as my throbbing old brain would allow, "is the day we dress as women."

Both Pukwans burst into howls and sneers of derision. "His brain has for sure flipped over in his skull," they agreed. "He has forgotten that this is the day of the council meeting."

They were right, I had forgotten. This was the morning that I, as tribal chairman, was supposed to preside, and then call a vote on whether we should

accept the large cash settlement that was offered us if we were willing to leave our scrap of land.

"Lend me clothes," I begged the Pukwans, instantly doubling the volume of their hilarity. When they refused, I drew myself up straight and headed off, trying to reclaim my dignity.

I had no idea what I could do to maintain my position of respect once I appeared before the meeting. I thought of two people on the way whose clothes I might beg, but they weren't home. Doubtless, they were waiting for me with the others at the powwow arbor, ready to decide the future of our tribe.

There was nothing for it, I counselled myself, but to go forward boldly and rely on inspiration. When I reached the arbor, I strode to the center of the dance ground, and instead of skulking and cringing in shame I threw open my arms. I turned in a circle and let people gawk and chatter and react with owlish surprise. When their speculation died away, I opened my mouth.

"Friends, relatives, *nindinawemaa-ganidok*," I said. "You have made free with your laughter. You have subjected this dress, which my wife made, to derision and to ridicule. You have satisfied yourselves at the expense of this piece of clothing I am wearing. Now let us speak of where it came from: the spirits. Let us speak of the decision before us—which also involves the spirits. Let us speak of my wife, Margaret, who is also called Rushes Bear. For the spirits, again, have called on her. Let us speak of her vision.

"This vision occurred to Margaret in the bush where the trees grow thick. That is when she saw the making of this dress, which some of you know was made with nothing ever touched by the *chimookomaanag*. This dress is sacred. This dress was made with healing in mind. So how, you wonder, did old Nanapush come to wear it? That is a very good question.

"Although I have faith in the old ways, I was finally persuaded to try the Eucharist. Father Damien and my dear wife have been after me for years to receive the benefit of the white man's God, and at last I did give in to their wishes. In one night, I made up for all the years of the blood of Christ that I had missed. Inspired by the sacramen-

tal wine, and perhaps a little mad, I persuaded my wife to let me wear her holy dress. In her compassion for me, she gave it up, saying that it contained a powerful medicine that might work with the wine to give me insight and wisdom into the grave problem now before us.

"I am not afraid, as others may be, that my manhood will be compromised by such a little thing as wearing a skirt. My manhood is made of stiffer stuff. Rather, I worry that I, like so many other men who boast of their superiority and revel in their brute strength, cleverness, or power, am unworthy to wear the dress of a woman."

Here I paused. I took a close look at the crowd. My initial impression—that it was composed of three women to every man—was confirmed. I went on.

"We call the earth Grandmother. We ask for her help when times are difficult. When we are lonely, or harrowed by death, we throw ourselves upon her and weep onto her breast. All that we are and all that we survive upon comes from the Grandmother. But there is a limit to everything, even your grandma's patience. When I donned my wife's dress, I admit that I was at first defiant, and, as I have confessed to you, quite drunk. But the dress itself is sacred, as you know, and even though I am a clever fool it stopped my thoughts and humbled me and made me listen.

"'Listen, old fool,' I heard the earth tell me. 'You are walking on my beautiful body. And I allow it, not because you are a human and not because you are a man, but because you were born of a woman. I, the earth, respect a woman's pain as it is freely given to the service of life. The only time you men suffer is when your bellies are stretched too full of the food your wives cook for you. What would you do, you poor creature, decorated with a knob and a couple of balls,' the earth asked me, 'if all the women of the world closed their legs to men? Die out, that's what. So, with my



generous nature, I have given you all that you have. You owe your life to me. Now I ask you, what have you given me in return?"

I turned to my relatives, my people, and opened my arms wide.

"What have we given her?"

To my question, there was no answer. I'd said enough. I walked off and left the assembly to ponder my words.

When they voted, they rejected the land settlement. So the dress worked. Its medicine was the sacred shame that it provoked in me and the power that it gave to my tongue and brain. I knew that it was the dress that had spoken through me, and I was humbled. In that mood, I decided to return to Margaret.

As I neared the cabin, I planned an anxious series of making-up offers, all based on my love for Margaret. I hoped that she would greet me, no matter how angry. I would endure her whipping tongue, bear the bite of her disdain, if only she was there, I thought, waiting for me. But when I got to our little home the door was shut, the cabin empty, the stove cold, and her blanket gone. I stood in the quiet, sick and wondering.

What gives us such cause to harm each other? Where do we come by our anger and our pride? I had no doubt even then that Margaret loved me and I loved her. Yet as a couple our main activity, it seemed, was making each other miserable.

"Please come home," I cried out the open door, "and let me love you the way you deserve!"

But from the massed green leaves and the thick growing trees there was no answer. At that moment, I understood that the *manidoog*, too, were tired of me, that I'd gone one step too far. I sank to the earth, put my head in my hands. With all my heart I wished to be forgiven. Going back through the nights and days, I began to count up all I'd done to the people around me. I tried to name each name, I tried to beg their mercy and humbly address each problem I'd created, starting with the day I tried to snare Shesheeb. I began with good intentions, but I quickly fell asleep.

The list was too long. The day too warm. The breeze so calm and golden. ♦

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THE CRITICS



BOOKS

THE NATURAL

The poetry and madness of John Clare.

BY JOHN LANCHESTER

In early 1860, a poetry fan from London called James Hipkins wrote to Dr. Wing, the superintendent of the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, inquiring after the welfare of one of the inmates, the nature poet John Clare. The sixty-six-year-old poet's reply is one of the last things he wrote:

March 8th 1860

Dear Sir

I am in a Madhouse & quite forget your Name or who you are you must excuse me for I have nothing to commu[n]icate or tell of & why I am shut up I dont know I have nothing to say so I conclude
yours respectfully

John Clare

Clare had been in the asylum for eighteen years, having previously spent four years in a private asylum in Essex. He had not once seen his wife in that time; three of his seven surviving children had died; his work had fallen into neglect, and his reputation, such as it was, focussed on his status as a peasant and as a lunatic. Jonathan Bate, in his biography, "John Clare" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$40), says of the Hipkins letter that "this is a voice not of madness but of quiet despair." I'm not sure that he's right—not caring whom you're writing to or why you're in a madhouse would be despair; not knowing is surely closer to insanity—but a reader can feel, and like, Bate's empathy with Clare, his willingness to imagine the texture of his plight. Bate is an energetic English-literature

professor at Warwick University, whose unacademic desire to write from the heart has been apparent in a study, "The Genius of Shakespeare"; a novel, "The Cure for Love"; and a passionate account of ecological themes in literature, "The Song of the Earth." Clare, in Bate's view, is "the one major English poet never to have received a biography that is worthy of his memory," and this fine and fair-minded book sets out to remedy the gap.

The great curse of Clare's life was poverty. He is the poorest major writer in the canon of English literature, so poor that he was often unable to afford paper. These struggles are reflected in some of his manuscripts: he made his own paper, if it can be called that, by scraping layers of birch bark, and his own ink by "a mix of bruised nut galls, green copper, and stone blue soaked in a pint and a half of rain-water"—and he was doing this after the supposed breakthrough success of his first book, "Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery," in 1820. Some of his manuscripts are made from letter covers stitched together; one of his best nature poems is written on the back of a handbill for a local election in which Clare could not vote, because the poor were excluded from the franchise.

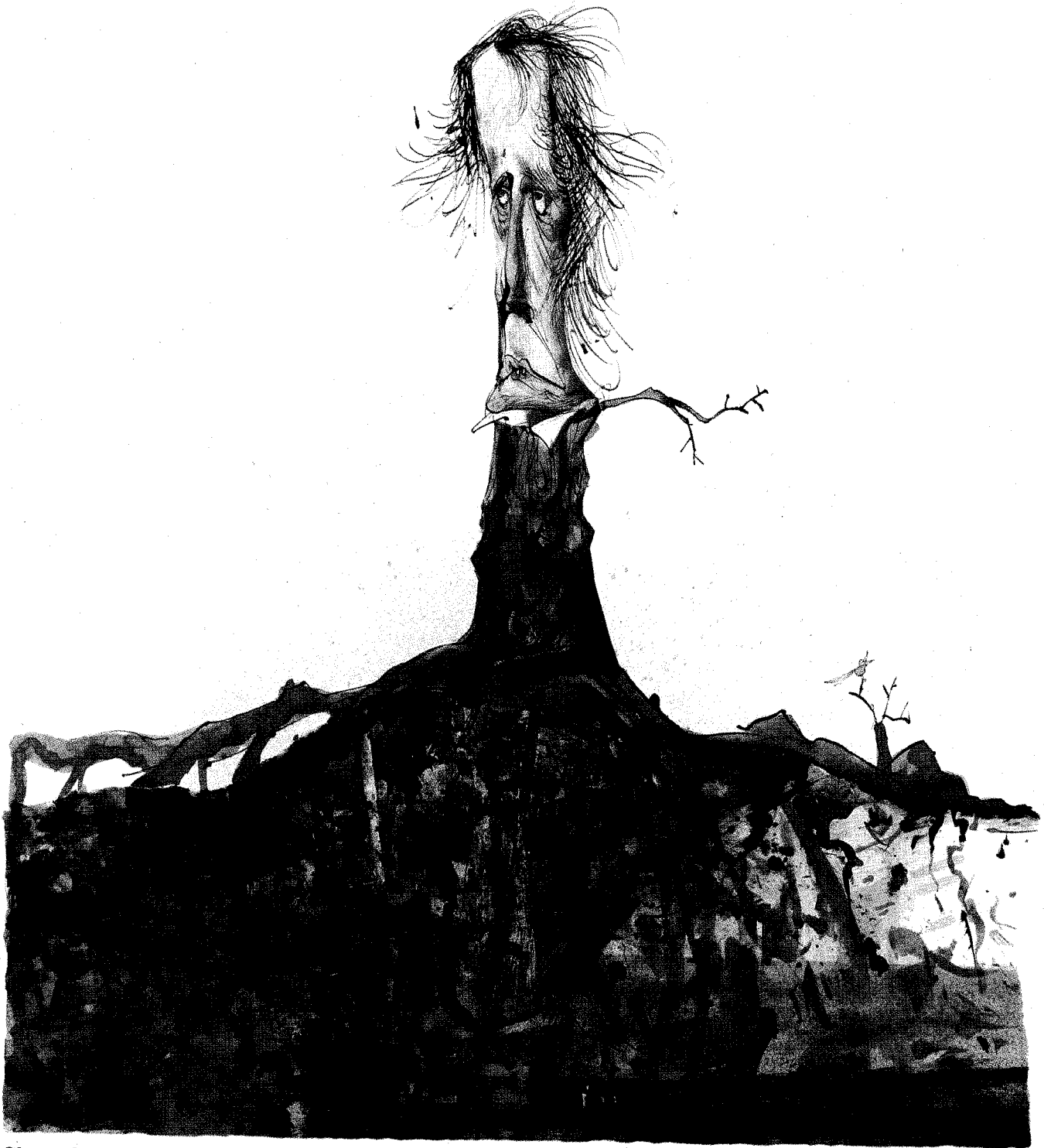
We perhaps talk too easily about "struggling artists"; but there is no denying that Clare's struggles with poverty were all-encompassing and lifelong. He was born in 1793, the son of Parker

Clare, who was a casual farm laborer in Northamptonshire, a pretty but unspectacular patch of countryside in the Midlands. The family's key asset was an apple tree outside their cottage which produced enough fruit to support them when Parker's rheumatism prohibited steady work. In the intervals between helping his father in the fields, John, from the age of five to the age of eleven, went to the village school, and acquired a passion for reading which sparked, in his early teens, the desire to become a poet—an extraordinarily unlikely thing for an early-nineteenth-century English peasant to think he could manage to be.

As the son of a peasant, Clare was born to a life of manual labor. It may be that nobody is entirely suited to a life of manual labor, but, if there are degrees of unsuitedness, John Clare would rank high. Stunted by malnutrition, he was small—five feet—accident-prone, and sickly; an early employer described him as "weak but willing." In his youth, he was put to work weeding and haymaking and stacking bales. He also worked for a pub landlord, plowing and looking after animals; as an apprentice gardener at the local mansion; as a militiaman (his company was known as the "Bum-Tools"); with fencing and hedging gangs; on a plantation; scouring out fish ponds; and in a lime works. He saw at first hand the transforming process of enclosure, in which common lands were taken over by rich landowners, and was appalled by its "lawless law." And all this time his mind was racing, burning, with poetry:

I could not stop my thoughts and often failed to keep them till night, so when I fancied I had hit upon a good image or natural description I used to sneak into a corner of the garden and clap it down, but the appearance of my employers often put my fancies to flight and made me lose the thought and the muse together, for I have always felt anxious to conceal my scribbling and would as leave have confessed to be a robber as a rhymers.

No one else wrote in circumstances like these, and no one else, uncoincidentally, wrote like John Clare. Among the other Romantics, Wordsworth is a master at reflecting on nature, Coleridge an inspired thief of images from the natural world, and Keats a great sensualist of natural perceptions. But nobody knew nature as well as Clare, or put so much of it into poetry. Clare resisted turning nature into metaphor, or into a mask of



Clare, who spent much of his life in a madhouse, detailed the countryside around him as a way of anchoring himself in reality.

the transcendent, and he was at his best saying something that the other Romantics never wanted to say: *it is what it is*. There are surges of emotion in his nature poetry—as Bate points out, one of his favorite phrases is “I love”—but their movement is consistently away from fantasy, back to the thing itself. At the same time, there is something desperately intense about the way Clare clings to details, anchoring himself in the particular. His poetry eludes short quotation—there is no single phrase of Clare’s to rival, say, Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud.” His effects are quiet and accumulative, and his poems are most effective when taken in full, as with “Emmonsails Heath in Winter”:

I love to see the old heath’s withered brake
Mingle its crimped leaves with furze and
ling
While the old heron from the lonely lake
Starts slow and flaps his melancholy wing
And oddling crow in idle motions swing
On the half-rotten ash tree’s topmost twig
Beside whose trunk the gypsy makes his
bed—
Up flies the bouncing woodcock from the
brig
Where a black quagmire quakes beneath
the tread;
The fieldfare chatters in the whistling
thorn
And for the ’awe round fields and closen
rove
And coy bumarrels twenty in a drove
Flit down the hedgerows in the frozen plain
And hang on little twigs and start again.

“’Awe” is the Northamptonshire dialect term for hawthorn berry, “closen” are small fields or enclosures, and “bumbarrel,” wonderfully, is the long-tailed tit. This poem is so fluid and apparently casual that we are almost surprised to realize that it is a sonnet. It doesn’t go anywhere, and yet it does, and that is one of the most modern things about Clare. His poetry has its obvious affinities with modern masters such as Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, and William Carlos Williams, but its in-the-momentness, its willingness to wander about and see what happens and arrive back where it started, also establishes a link with the cool school of modern flaneurs like Frank O’Hara and John Ashbery. Don’t just take my word for it: Ashbery himself, in a superb essay about the poet, has said that “the effect of Clare’s poetry, on me at least, is always the same—that of re-inserting me in my present, of re-establishing ‘now.’”

The fact that Clare’s virtues are things

that we recognize and like in some contemporary poetry was not, however, an automatic recipe for success in his own time. Even Keats, another great working-class English poet of the day, thought that “the Description too much prevailed over the Sentiment.” When Clare began to be taken up by editors and patrons, he was valued first and foremost as a freak: the title page of his first book described him as “A Northamptonshire Peasant.” The editor’s introduction called him “the least favoured by circumstances, and the most destitute of friends, of any [poet] that ever existed.” This freak value was important, and so was the conventional, sententious side of Clare, apparent in works such as “An Effusion to Poesy on receiving a Damp from a genteel Opinionist in Poetry, of some sway, as I am told, in the Literary World.” Readers and the London literary world loved it, and Clare was briefly all the rage, making a vivid impression on men like his first editor, Edward Drury:

Clare cannot *reason*; he writes and can give no reason for his using a fine expression, or a beautiful idea: if you read Poetry to him, he’ll exclaim at each delicate expression “beautiful! fine!” but can give no reason: yet is *always* correct and just in his remarks. He is low in stature—long visage—light hair—coarse features—ungaitly—awkward—is a fiddler—loves ale—likes the *girls*—somewhat idle,—hates work.

Clare almost met Keats, who shared the same publisher; he met William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb. Local bigwigs chipped in to buy him an annuity; Prince Leopold, son-in-law of the Regent, subscribed to his next volume. He began to get fan mail—a mixed blessing at a time when the recipient of a letter was expected to pay the postage. A week after he returned from the dizzy celebration of publication in London, Clare married Patty Turner, an illiterate local girl; their first child, Anna, was born in June, less than three months after the wedding.

But Clare was the kind of person who, even when he gets a break, can’t get a break. It was partly to do with the type of poetry he wrote, which grew less popular as it grew less easily moralistic and less familiar to its readership; and it was partly to do with a sharp decline in the audience for poetry. In late 1825, there was a bank crash, which led to a recession the following year (the Great Panic, as it was called), which led to a sharp down-

turn in publishing in general, and poetry publishing in particular. There was also a sense that the key cultural moment of the Romantic movement was over. Wordsworth and Coleridge were both past their best; Keats (whose last book sold five hundred copies) died in 1821, Byron in 1824—Clare saw the funeral procession, with Byron’s coffin being followed by the empty carriages of aristocrats who were avoiding their scandalous fellow-peer even in death. If Clare had been born twenty years earlier, in time for the Byron boom, his career might have been different. As it was, each of his books—“Poems, Descriptive” was followed by “The Village Minstrel” (1821), “The Shepherd’s Calendar” (1827), and “The Rural Muse” (1835)—was better than the preceding, and each one sold fewer copies. The poetry public, such as it was, preferred lavishly produced Christmas anthologies to actual books by poets. In 1825, Clare submitted poems to two such anthologies, was extensively rewritten, and wrote to a friend that “as to the Poetical Almanacks, they may all go to Hell next year.” But he kept submitting poems to the annuals, because he couldn’t afford not to. It comes as a jolt to find that in the summer of 1826, at the age of thirty-three and some years after what should have been his life-changing success, Clare was still having to go out into the fields and undertake manual labor to support his family.

The publication of his books meant that Clare wasn’t just an agricultural laborer anymore, but he also wasn’t a writer, or, if he was, he was one who lived in a peasant cottage, in a peasant village, surrounded by peasants, and who was expected when times were hard to do the same work as them:

I live here among the ignorant like a lost man in fact like one whom the rest seems careless of having anything to do with—they hardly dare talk in my company for fear I should mention them in my writings and I find more pleasure in wandering the fields than in musing among my silent neighbours who are insensible to every thing but toiling and talking of it and that to no purpose.

This sounds bleak, but it also sounds true—and this was before Clare’s poems became less popular and the smart set dropped him, with the result that he was left even more between worlds. “I had a variety of minds about me and all of them unsettled,” he said once, and the

remark goes deep. It was increasingly hard for him to know who he was or where he belonged, and he gradually came to feel that he did not belong anywhere. His behavior became more and more erratic; he began to see "blue devils" and to suffer from vivid delusions. "He showed aberrations of intellect by variety of fancies," the local vicar reported. "Among the most prominent was that of appearing to see spirits of a hideous description moving about in the ceiling of the room." There was a scandal when he disrupted a performance of "The Merchant of Venice" by shouting abuse at Shylock. Clare had for some time had long depressive spells, alternating with manic episodes, a pattern that today would be seen as classically bipolar. He became harder for his wife, Patty, to cope with. Eventually, on July 8, 1837, his doctors signed a certificate of insanity, and he was taken to Dr. Allen's asylum, in Essex. He went into the asylum around the time of his forty-fourth birthday.

Bate's account of Clare's madness shows his book at its humane best. "Post-humous psychiatric diagnosis is a dubious activity," he warns, before adding, "Madness is of an age, not for all time. It is experienced and witnessed in history." Bate convincingly argues against schizophrenia—often cited as the source of Clare's illness—as the cause, and discusses instead the possible roles of bipolar affective disorder, diet, malaria, alcoholism, post-traumatic stress, and sexually transmitted disease, before concluding that "his condition is better described as a 'nervous breakdown' than an eruption of 'lunacy.'" This seems right. Clare's mind broke, and he lost his grip on who he was. In the asylum, a key theme of his delusions was that he was somebody else. Byron was his favorite alternative identity—the super-confident poet-peer, who never doubted who he was for a moment. Clare wrote some mock-Byronic poems, either believing that he was the peer or trying to impersonate him, or a bit of both. In some moods, Clare thought that he was a prizefighter; in others, that he had written Shakespeare's plays. He thought that he was Nelson, or Wellington, or a son of George III. He lost himself. After seeing Queen Victoria on a rural tour in 1844, he told the asylum keeper that he had spoken to her. She had said, "I'm John Clare."

Today, we take our right to invent ourselves more or less for granted. Clare could not and did not. His poetry was an effort of self-invention. Its crystalline focus on specifics was a way for him to fix himself in place against the centrifugal pressures of his imagination. For him the issue was: if you begin making yourself up, where do you stop, and how do you come back to being the person you used to be—how do you come back to yourself?

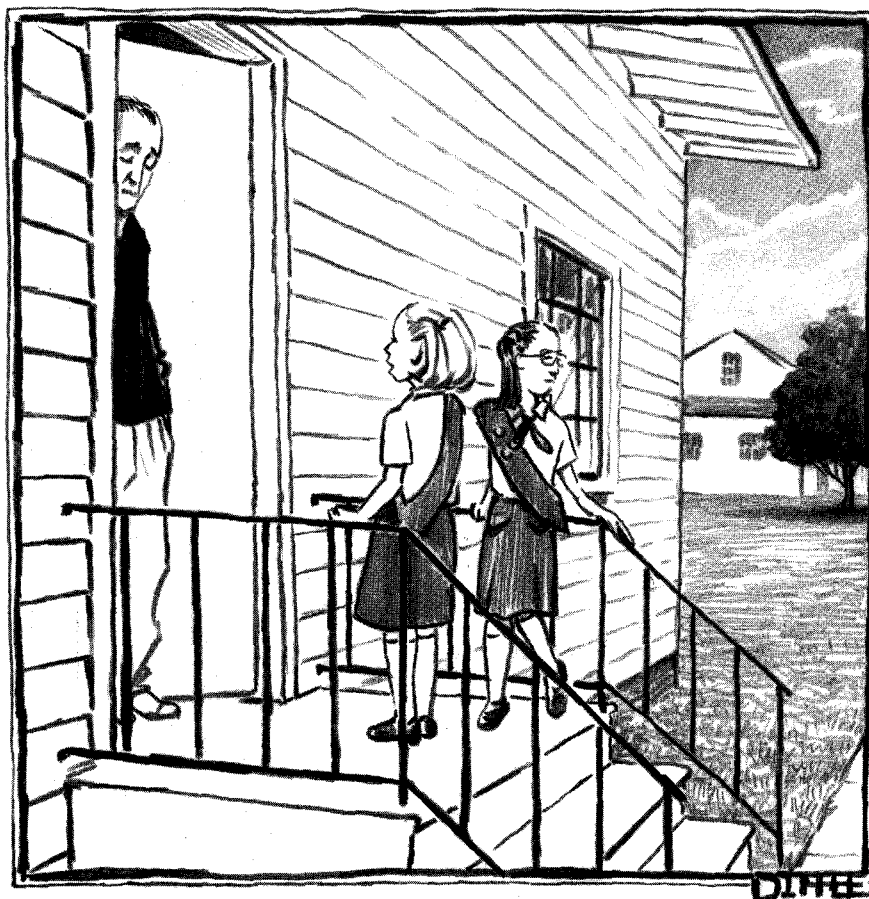
I am—yet what I am, none cares or knows;
My friends forsake me like a memory lost:
I am the self-consumer of my woes—
They rise and vanish in oblivion's host
Like shadows in love-frenzied stilled
throes—
And yet I am and love—like vapours
tossed

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise
Into the living sea of waking dreams
Where there is neither sense of life or joys
But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
Even the dearest that I love the best
Are strange—nay, rather, stranger than
the rest.

These desolate lines are from "I Am," one of the great poems Clare wrote in the Northampton General Lunatic Asy-

lum, the second asylum to which he was committed. In July, 1841, he had escaped from Dr. Allen's asylum and walked the hundred-odd miles home, so hungry on the journey that he ate grass. When he arrived, he was devastated not to find his first love, Mary Joyce, and their (imaginary) children there: he had convinced himself that he was married to her as well as to Patty. Clare's stay at home lasted five months, before he was committed again, this time to the public asylum in Northampton, "much the grandest building Clare ever lived in," as Bate notes. Some of his best poetry dates from the early years in the asylum—poetry about whose existence his contemporaries had no idea. He remained there for the rest of his life, with the flow of poems and letters gradually dwindling, and lived in total obscurity until his death, from a stroke, in 1864, at the age of seventy.

Poets need luck in life, and they need it in death, too, if their work is to find readers. Clare wrote about thirty-five hundred poems, of which about four hundred were published in



"Would you like to buy some Girl Scout crack?"

his lifetime. The ideal thing would have been for these poems to be discovered, edited, and published, to great acclaim, making Clare's place in the pantheon secure. However, a quickie biography by Frederick Martin, in 1865, had the inevitable effect of focussing attention more on the life than on the work; a "Life and Remains of John Clare," in 1873, broke the news that Clare had continued writing in the asylum, but received patronizing reviews. For the next ninety years, Clare's manuscripts sat in the Northampton library and the Peterborough Museum. Then, in 1963, an expat British scholar, Eric Robinson, began a decades-long project of editing and publishing Clare's work in the multivolume scholarly edition the poet so clearly deserved. The ninth and final volume came out in the United States from Oxford University Press in April of this year.

The appearance of this magisterial edition should have been a happy ending. Robinson, however, did not only edit Clare; in 1965, he bought the copyright of his unpublished work—i.e., most of his work—for the regal sum of one pound. This means that, in theory, nobody can publish Clare's previously unpublished work without Robinson's permission, effectively giving him a stranglehold over all Clare studies. But does he really control the copyright? The basis of his claim is that he bought the rights from the publishing company J. Whitaker & Sons Ltd., which had, in turn, bought the rights from Clare's widow and family, in 1864. Copyright law is never simple, and this claim—resting on a legal document between Joseph Whitaker and the Clares which was not discovered until 1932 and was destroyed by a German bomb in 1940—is the subject of some debate. In fact, jaded fans of "W.W.E. Smackdown!" who long to see some real fighting could do worse than turn their attention to the field of Clare studies. A 2000 letter in the *Times Literary Supplement*, signed by twenty-eight poets and Clare scholars, among them the Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney and the Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, called the copyright claim "little short of scandalous" and urged the academic world to "resist the suppression of competing editions." The letter was prompted by the news that Robinson had threatened legal ac-

tion against a young Clare scholar who had brought out an edition without his permission. Jonathan Bate treads carefully in the introduction to his new edition of Clare's poetry, "I Am": The Selected Poetry of John Clare," expressing gratitude to Robinson without exactly deferring to his claim to own the copyrights. So does he or doesn't he? The definitive legal answer seems to be "Dunno."

The issue is a real one for readers because the question of editing Clare is impossible to dodge. His manuscripts were violently chaotic: his handwriting was hard to read, his spelling was terrible, his grammar was poor, and the poems were liberally flecked with always obscure and now extinct terms in Northamptonshire dialect. While he was alive, his editors cleaned up his spelling and grammar, and often went so far as to rewrite the poems. Eric Robinson, in his scholarly edition, chose to "un-edit" Clare, and present his manuscripts as he wrote them, in as raw a state as possible. The result is indubitably authentic but also at times difficult to read, and it certainly isn't inviting for readers unfamiliar with Clare. Here, for instance, is a stanza from the official, Robinson-edited manuscript version of a poem unpublished in Clare's lifetime and later titled "The Lament of Swordy Well." This is the elegiac, political Clare, his identification with the land at its most nearly complete:

I own Im poor like many more
But then the poor mun live
And many came for miles before
For what I had to give
But since I fell upon the town
They pass me with a sigh
Ive scarce the room to say sit down
And so they wander bye

Not every line of Robinson's nine-volume edition of Clare's poetry is like that, but a lot of it is. There is something magnificent about such fidelity to what Clare actually wrote, and the briefest glimpse of the manuscripts explains why the project took forty years to complete. This is Clare at his uncompromising Clare-est. The question is, What would Clare have wanted? In some moods, he was dismissive of grammar—"I am gennerally understood tho I do not use that awkward squad of pointings called commas colons semi-

colons etc"—but he was also grateful to his editors, and keen not to appear illiterate, or to present unnecessary obstacles to being read.

Jonathan Bate's edition of the poems takes a sensible middle route, cleaning up the spelling and punctuation but not changing the words Clare wrote, to give as much authenticity as possible while reaching out to new readers. He is surely right when he says that "Im" has little to be said for it as a variant of "I'm"; it isn't a funky, Emily Dickinson-type piece of idiosyncratic orthography—it's a simple mistake. Punctuating those lines and tidying them up, and doing the same to the thousands of other similar lines of Clare, would surely do no harm; or would it? Bate's accessible edition of the poems, aimed at the biggest possible readership, is a long-overdue break for Clare. But there is an ironic twist to this, since a Clare who had been able to spell and punctuate, and supervise his own publications so that we had a satisfactory final text, would have been a Clare who had a level of educational and economic support that the real-life poet never enjoyed. He would have had every opportunity to feel confident about who he was, and he would in that defining respect not have been the real John Clare. Clare felt so deeply that he did not have a completely fixed and stable identity that it is perhaps appropriate that we will never have a completely fixed and stable text of his poems. In fact, even such a familiar lyric set piece as "The Moors" simply doesn't exist in the manuscripts as a singular entity, but evolved out of a passage in a longer, messier work. The poem, as it was first published, had been cut up, spliced together, and made into something that it wasn't, quite. Clare's poetry gets away from us, as he both longed and dreaded to get away from himself. It is as if he had achieved in his afterlife the sense of escape that eluded him in life, the condition he imagined in the third and final stanza of "I Am":

I long for scenes where man hath never
trod,
A place where woman never smiled or
wept,
There to abide with my creator, God,
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept,
Untroubling and untroubled where I lie,
The grass below—above, the vaulted
sky. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Furies, by *Fernanda Eberstadt* (Knopf; \$26). One afternoon in Central Park, Gwen Lewis, a high-powered thirty-one-year-old Russia wonk, notices a pair of red Converse high-tops with a hole in the toe, worn by a man sleeping on a bench. Two weeks later, in Novosibirsk on a business trip, she discovers that the shoes belong to Gideon Wolkowitz, a puppeteer from the Lower East Side, whose company is touring Siberia. In the flush nineteen-nineties, can a Wasp plutocrat's daughter find happiness with an impecunious Jewish radical? Eberstadt's skills bring to mind the early A. S. Byatt (the darting, foxlike intelligence; the searing judgments), and her dissection of class differences has a physical urgency that lifts her characters above their schematic limitations. With psychological precision, she keeps her gaze—and ours—steady, as the lovers, through a combination of will and carelessness, tear themselves apart.

Elizabeth Costello, by *J. M. Coetzee* (Viking; \$21.95). Billed as fiction, this puzzling book by the new Nobel laureate in literature is more nebulously a collection of essays, all but two previously published, embedded within the story of an aging novelist, Elizabeth Costello, as she goes on the lecture circuit. Costello first appeared in Coetzee's slender 1999 volume "The Lives of Animals," in which she delivered a college address on animal rights, and that text is reprised here as part of eight "lessons" that she must give or receive, ranging in subject from literary realism to the problem of evil. Coetzee's work has always been distinguished by cerebral rigor, which in his strongest novels propels narratives of claustrophobic and often savage intimacy. But here he seems to have lost faith in the power of storytelling; his heroine's journey

takes place almost entirely in the realm of the mind, and the effect is that of exploring a cold, depopulated planet.

Fallingwater Rising, by *Franklin Toker* (Knopf; \$35). When a house becomes a celebrated work of architecture, it tends to be treated as if it had sprung full-grown from the brow of its creator. Probably no house has been more subject to this myth than Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's extraordinary essay in horizontal space, which is perched above a waterfall in southwestern Pennsylvania. According to legend, Wright dallied for months after receiving the commission, then drew up the plans in just two hours, as his client, the Pittsburgh department-store magnate E. J. Kaufmann, was en route to Wright's studio to check on his progress. Toker makes quick work of this fiction, tracing the long, careful evolution of Wright's brilliant design. Most important, he tells the story of Kaufmann and his wife, and shows that the house was equally a reflection of these two strong-willed clients and their complex marriage.

Diaspora, by *Frédéric Brenner* (HarperCollins; \$100). Since the late nineteen-seventies, Brenner has travelled the world photographing Jewish families and communities: Hasidim in Jerusalem, seeking to re-create the village life of their forebears in Eastern Europe; Marranos in Portugal, observing their rituals in secret, as they have since the Inquisition; the women rabbis and cantors of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary; and, in a more secular vein, Tajikistani barbers, Hollywood moguls, and Calcutta merchants. This handsome two-volume set presents Brenner's images along with commentary from such writers as Jacques Derrida, Julius Lester, Stanley Cavell, and Carlos Fuentes. Often the pictures provoke contradictory responses, as when a group of Roman Jews are shown standing proudly amid the ruins of a classical amphitheatre. Brenner's work—elegiac, celebratory, irreverent—transcends portraiture, representing instead a prolonged, open-ended inquiry into the nature of identity and heritage.

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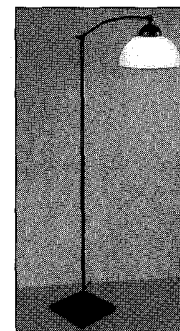
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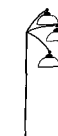
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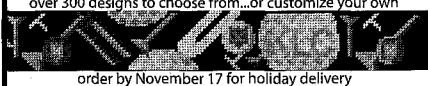
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BOOKS

SHOWTIME

A Booker Prize winner reimagines America.

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

It's hot as hell in Martirio, but the papers on the porch are icy with the news." So begins "Vernon God Little" (Canongate; \$23), a frenetic yet unexpectedly moving first novel by the pseudonymous D. B. C. Pierre, this year's dark-horse Booker Prize winner. Narrated in the highly idiomatic voice of Vernon Gregory Little, a fifteen-year-old Texas boy whose rotten luck it is to find himself a "skate-goat" in the aftermath of a Columbine-type massacre of sixteen high-school students committed by his best friend, "Vernon God Little" is raucous and brooding, coarse and lyric, corrosive and sentimental in about equal measure.

D. B. C. (the initials stand for "Dirty But Clean") Pierre was born Peter Finlay, in 1961, in Australia, but was brought as an infant to live in the United States and then Mexico; he spent his teen-age years in Mexico City, and as an adult he has lived in London, Australia, and Ireland. One of Pierre's ongoing preoccupations is drawing cartoons, an ideal background for the creator of the foulmouthed but subtle-minded Vernon, whose vision of the adult world that surrounds him is savagely satiric: "This is how I'm being grown up, this is my fucken struggle for learnings and glory. A gumbo of lies, cellulite, and fucken 'Wuv.'"

Pierre has a flawless ear for adolescent-boy speech. To his young narrator, virtually every adjective is "fucken" and every vision of every adult is laced with repugnance, especially those adults in authority: "Deputy Gurie tears a strip of meat from a bone; it flaps through her lips like a shit taken backwards." And, "A strip of buffalo leather scrapes into the room, tacked around the soul of Sheriff Porkornay."

Though Vernon loves his overweight, comically self-pitying mother, he smolders at her emotional blackmail of him, which he shrewdly assesses as a mother's

way of infantilizing a maturing, potentially rebellious son: "It's like she planted a knife in my back when I was born, and now every fucken noise she makes just gives it a turn." Vernon's fury at his mother inspires some of the novel's funniest rants:

I'll tell you a learning: knife-turners like my ole lady actually spend their waking hours connecting shit into a humon-



D. B. C. Pierre

gous web, just like spiders. It's true. They take every word in the fucken universe, and index it back to your knife. In the end it doesn't matter what words you say, you feel it on your blade. Like, "Wow, see that car?" "Well it's the same blue as that jacket you threw up on at the Christmas show, remember?" What I learned is that parents succeed by managing the database of your dumbness and your slime, ready for combat. They'll cut you down in a split fucken second, make no mistake; much quicker than you'd use the artillery you dream about.

Vernon is a Holden Caulfield on amphetamines, with "lawless brown hair, the eyelashes of a camel. Big ole puppy-dog features like God made me through a fucken magnifying glass. You know right away my movie's the one where I puke on my legs."

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

The action of "Vernon God Little" takes place after the high-school massacre. Pierre wisely makes little attempt to evoke the actual shootings and the suicide of the perpetrator. We see the broody "Meskin" (i.e., Mexican) Jesus Navarro only fleetingly, through Vernon's sympathetic eyes: "He's still clumsy as hell though, and his mind's clumsy too; the certainty of our kid logic got washed away, leaving pebbles of anger and doubt that crack together with each new wave of emotion. . . . He keeps secrets from me, like he never did before. He got weird." Among the secrets that Jesus, a boy beset by "philosophical headfucks," keeps from Vernon is one regarding his sexual exploitation by two adult men ("Nuckles," "Goosens") involved in a homosexual pornography Web site, which precipitates the disaster.

The novel is a curious admixture of high-decibel video-game farce and interludes of sobriety during which the author's mask slips and we find ourselves in the presence not of the hormone-tormented Vernon but of a rueful adult male contemplating "this dry residue of horror." Even as the narrator presents an America of near-illiterate media-hypnotized idiots, who eagerly believe virtually anything they are told to believe, the appalled reaction to such a vision seems to come from a deeper place in the author's psyche:

A learning grows in me like a tumor. It's about the way different needy people find the quickest route to get some attention in their miserable fucken lives. The fucken oozing nakedness, the despair of being such a vulnerable egg-sac of a critter, like, a so-called human being, just sickens me sometimes, especially right now. The Human Condition, Mom calls it. Watch out for that fucker.

The novel's funniest scenes, which are poor Vernon's most desperate, take place in Mexico, where he has fled in order not to be arrested as an accessory to the mass murder. On his sixteenth birthday, he is seduced and betrayed by a college-student temptress who gives him up to the police, and is brought back to Texas to stand trial in a blaze of media attention: "They harness me into a chair, and we get escorted into town by half the world's police cars. All the world's helicopters ride overhead, beaming lights down like a Hollywood premiere,

the fucken Slime Oscars, boy." And awaiting the suspected psycho-killer are "hordes of angry people, the type that show up wherever angry people are needed."

Disturbingly, in the novel's final sections Vernon Gregory Little has morphed into the TV image of a generic psycho-kid killer, with a shaved head, thick eyeglasses, and a crucifix on a chain worn around his neck. Yet more disturbingly, Vernon no longer "cusses." He's trapped in a Texas prison that—all too plausibly, given the fad for reality TV—has sold broadcast rights for a program in which the prisoners are televised twenty-four hours a day for purposes of entertainment. The show's producer points out, "Criminals cost money. Popular TV makes money. Criminals are popular on TV. Put them together and, presto—problem solved."

Vernon, who soon finds himself in competition with other prisoners, is urged by his mother to perform for the TV cameras:

"It's just that this week you're up against that sweet cripple who supposedly killed his parents. And he cries all the time. *All* the time."

"You sayin I look guilty?"

"Well on camera you always just lie staring at the ceiling, Vernon, you can be so *impassive*."

"But I didn't do nothin'."

"Don't let's start that again. I just don't want the day to arrive and you not be—you know—ready."

For all its energy and invention, "Vernon God Little" does occasionally flag. Mordant satire is uneasily matched with slapstick plot reversals, and it must be conceded that the objects of Pierre's contempt—tabloid TV, consumer-culture idiocy, the American obsession with the sufferings of others, material goods, and "image"—are not very original. Jonathan Swift once observed, "Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own," and so it might be charged, too, of satirists who excoriate others while exempting themselves from blame. "Vernon God Little" is fuelled by rage at those who would "turn slime into business," but this may seem to be what Pierre himself has done with such skill and panache. As Vernon says, "I already know I'll be offering a Service. I just have to Position and Package the thing." ♦

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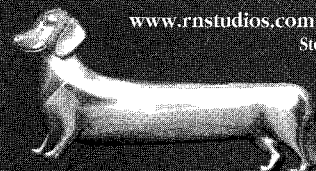
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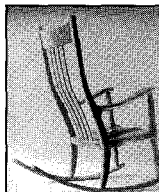
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TIME PIECES

James Rosenquist at the Guggenheim.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The James Rosenquist retrospective now at the Guggenheim turns Frank Lloyd Wright's helix into a pinball machine. Your ambulatory gaze is the rolling ball. The paintings and the occasional sculpture are lights and bumpers, emitting tacit *dings* and *thoks* when struck. Rosenquist—one of the big three masters of American Pop painting, with Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein—has always striven, as a matter of earnest principle, to make his works befuddlingly sensational at first sight. The show's installation on Wright's ramp, by the curators Walter Hopps and Sarah Bancroft, amplifies spectacle to a pitch of happy panic. The consequences are mixed. Rosenquist's best work exhibits firm formal command and deft philosophical nuance, rewarding contemplation, and these aspects of the art suffer. One notes them numbly, in passing. Conversely, inferior works—mostly from the nineteen-eighties and nineties, when Rosenquist regularly indulged in overbearing, mere razzmatazz—come off rather better than they deserve. The show's off-ramp, rectilinear galleries provide oases of discrimination. One room contains the artist's masterpiece, "F-111" (1964-65), which has long had my vote as the Great American Painting. Another displays collage studies for that work, which, in a scrappier sort of way, are as prepossessing as Picasso's drawings for "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon."

Pinball machines are obsolete, of course, in the manner of dial telephones and leaded gasoline. But obsolescence is a central concern, which proves to be evergreen, of Rosenquist's definitive works of the nineteen-sixties. He culled images of cars, clothes, hair styles, food (a hot dog, canned peaches), and what-not from magazines several years old—*Life*, usually—and painted fragments of them in abrupt, enigmatic juxtapositions. Wildly disparate in scale and var-

ied in acrid colors and grisaille, not to mention possible meaning, the images in those works are unified by a mode of brushwork—broadly stroked modulations of white and one other color at a time—that he learned as a professional billboard painter, scaffolded above Times Square. Was importing the method into art a bit of a cheap trick? So were Warhol's photo silk-screening and Lichtenstein's limning of panels from comic strips. The goal in all cases was to fuse painting aesthetics with the semiotics of media-drenched contemporary reality. The naked efficiency of anti-personal artmaking defines classic Pop. It's as if someone were inviting you to inspect the fist with which he simultaneously punches you.

Being slightly out of date—like the circa-1950 car combined with the heads of a loving couple and a snarl of tomato-sauced spaghetti in "I Love You with My Ford" (1961)—estranges Rosenquist's early images in time as billboard technique (calculated to produce illusion only when seen from afar) does in space. In every era, the recent past is a rolling blind spot of culture, occluding things that are too stale for fashion and too fresh for nostalgia. Exploiting the eeriness of such entities is a defining practice of so-called "postmodern" artists, who tend to hold Rosenquist in high regard. Actually, the poetry of recent pastness is as old as self-conscious modernity. Charles Baudelaire noticed it in 1859, as a "ghostly piquancy," apropos of outdated fashion plates. To deem the phenomenon novel is a perennial, honest mistake that attends each generation's awakening sense of itself as unique in history—a sense that is born in shock at the evanescence of what, in childhood, had seemed to be the world's normal state. Rosenquist anatomized the recurrent trauma in his work of the sixties.

A blue-collar, prairie Baudelairean,

Rosenquist was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, in 1933 and grew up on the move with his father, who was an airplane mechanic, among other things, and his mother, a sometime pilot who encouraged his interest in art. His art education, at the University of Minnesota and then at New York's Art Students League, coincided with jobs painting gas stations in the Midwest and billboards in New York. In 1956, while struggling to be a credible abstract painter, he fell into a charmed circle of emerging artists that included Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Ellsworth Kelly. In 1960, he rented a studio that had been vacated by Agnes Martin on Coenties Slip, way downtown near the East River piers; Kelly and the painters Robert Indiana and Jack Youngerman worked nearby. He made his first distinctively Pop paintings while unaware of similar work by Warhol and Lichtenstein, who were unaware of him and of each other. That was a moment of *Zeitgeist* like branched lightning.

In "President Elect," which Rosenquist began in 1960 and finished in 1964, the grinning face of John F. Kennedy appears to sprout hands that offer cake to an old car. The artist has said that his intent was satirical, having to do with the dubiousness of politicians' campaign promises. (Politically, he is a populist skeptic of the Midwestern "show me" ilk.) But any interpretation of the picture is overwhelmed by the clanging qualities—J.F.K.'s glamour, the car's dowdy styling—and the lurching disjunctions of its parts. You cannot look at the painting and have cogent thoughts about it at the same time. Looking and thinking jam up like derailed train cars. At his best, Rosenquist is a maestro of distraction, delivering it in exact, potent doses. The effect feels broadly significant. This art comprehends the typical worldly experience of the people who come to look at it. To be undistracted, in modern times, requires selective, blinkered attention. Rosenquist rules that out.

There are often shaggy-dog sorts of stories behind Rosenquist's works. While driving at night on a visit to Texas, the artist was fascinated by tumbleweeds looming in his car's headlights. The memory spawned the sculp-

ture "Tumbleweed" (1963-66), a tangle of chromed barbed wire around three crossed wooden beams, threaded with a curlicue of glowing blue neon tubing. Knowing the source of the piece is remarkably and instructively not helpful. The specificity of the forms and materials and of their respective associations anchor "Tumbleweed" in the here and

starry skies, gleaming machines, common objects, and perhaps shards of a woman's face or hand tumble forth to no discernible purpose. Jettisoning both billboard brushwork and the pathos of recent-pastness, Rosenquist proved how indispensable those elements had been to his earlier achievement. Formerly mysterious, his work became confusing.

feet high and eighty-six feet long, the multipanelled wraparound work punctuates a nearly actual-size rendering of the eponymous Vietnam-era fighter-bomber with raucous vignettes: a car tire, a cake, light bulbs, a little girl under a warhead-shaped hair dryer, a beach umbrella superimposed on an atomic-bomb cloud, bubbles ascending from a diver's



Rosenquist photographed by Dennis Hopper at a billboard factory in Los Angeles in 1964.

now, as a touchstone of modern sculpture that improbably combines surrealistic giddiness and matter-of-fact minimalism. You know that a work by Rosenquist is good when your futile efforts to make sense of it run in rather precise circles—mental wheels turning, pleasurably, in a void of decidable meaning.

Rosenquist started to go wrong in the seventies by forsaking specificity of both subject and technique. He was caught up in romances of space exploration and high-tech industry. He also seemed to fall in love with his own increasing skills as an oil painter, making sheer virtuosity the effective subject of mural-size extravaganzas in which

I gladly report that, of late, the artist has found a new balance, not by trying to revive Pop strategies but by backing up farther, to resume his youthful ambition as an abstract painter. A recent painting in the Guggenheim show, the gigantic "The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light" (2000), seventeen feet high by forty-six feet long, is a congeries of swirling, crumpled, highlight-bedizened, unidentifiable shapes pulled flat by uniformly fuzzed brushwork. It is beautiful.

Then there's "F-111," installed in a space that reproduces the dimensions of the front room of the old Leo Castelli Gallery on East Seventy-seventh Street, for which it was designed. Ten

helmet, and spaghetti in unappetizing yellow and red. As the imagery recedes visually in pictorial space, assertive surface patterns, panels of reflective aluminum, and Day-Glo colors advance. A viewer is at once seduced and assaulted at every point, with every glance. With terrific poise and mighty rhythm, "F-111" stirs a binge feeling—part "too much" and part "never enough," dread and exhilaration—that distills the excess of America in the sixties. The work conveys not why we were in Vietnam but what we were there and everywhere, at a moment of soaring and crashing confidence. To have created it should assure Rosenquist the permanent gratitude of a bedevilled nation. ♦

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THE THEATRE

DOWN UNDERDOG

The life and times of Australia's pluckiest son.

BY HILTON ALS

By 1964, the twenty-year-old singer-songwriter Peter Allen had seemingly gone as far as an ambitious, young, white, bisexual man from small-town Tenterfield, Australia, could go. The more excitable half of the Allen Brothers, a fake-brother act that had toured Australia for a number of years, he had a gig singing in the lounge at the Hong Kong Hilton—in Cantonese. But the glitz of swinging British-ruled Hong Kong was still a far cry from the shimmering filigree of Allen's show-biz dreams. According to Martin Sherman, who wrote the book for the new musical "The Boy from Oz" (at the Imperial), rescue for Allen and his "brother" Chris Bell arrived in the diminutive form of Judy Garland. She was on her way back to the States from a tour in Australia, where she had engaged in a number of characteristic antics both on- and offstage. Overextending herself to the point of collapse and concert cancellation, Garland had also worn out as many other people as her formidable will—and wiles—could gather up. Now she was flying home over that "goddam rainbow," her gay husband in tow.

In "The Boy from Oz," Allen (played by Hugh Jackman) has just slept with "Mr. Garland" when he recognizes the legendary chanteuse (Isabel Keating) getting hammered and increasingly agitated in the hotel bar. To calm Garland down, he coaxes her into singing a lovely ballad, "All I Wanted Was the Dream." Keating, in a red dress, red heels, and a red, sparkly top with the famous Judy-in-the-sixties cowl neck, opens her red-lipped mouth, and the audience gasps: we're in the presence of a great theatrical star impersonating a great theatrical star. Keating delivers a near-perfect rendition of Garland's exhausting and inexhaustible need, performing with a skill and delicacy of interpretation that go well beyond her subject's own abilities. Garland could only be herself (and what a

self!); Keating, on the other hand, has the range, the discipline, and the technique to rise above the show's poor direction, by Philip Wm. McKinley, overwhelming the obvious staging and simply *living* the part. She's not camp—she's Judy.

But the reason we've come to see "The Boy from Oz" (the "Oz" in the title refers not only to Allen's Judy connection, but also to Australia) is to learn something about Allen, the all-singing, all-dancing entertainer who died of AIDS in 1992, so it's unfortunate that his character is shown up at every turn. Jackman—a charming, wildly hardworking performer, who made his name in such films as "X-Men" and "Swordfish"—has been put in the awkward position of having to prove that Allen is worthy of our attention. Whether the life of Peter Allen is enough to build a show around is open to debate; this is not the show that will answer the question.

Sherman has Jackman address the audience directly throughout much of the evening. Presumably, this solves a dramaturgical problem, by keeping the exposition out of the dialogue. But Sherman knows that he's cheating. Instead of a show, he has written a theatrical version of the first-person memoir, one in which the protagonist wears his heart (and his lungs) on his sleeve. As "The Boy from Oz" opens, Allen is alone on-stage with a piano. Overhead, purple lights cast a moody glow. He embarks on the story of his early days in Tenterfield, and the lights turn to brown and orange hues that bring to mind the Australian outback. (The excellent lighting work is by Donald Holder.) The son of a chipper mother and a brutal, alcoholic father, who eventually committed suicide, Peter Woolnough, we discover, took to performing at a tender age. As a boy, he tap-danced, sang, and played the piano—skills that generally amused his mother but not his father. These biographical details are illustrated by young

Peter himself (Mitchel David Federan), who entertains at home and at the local pub, while Jackman looks on admiringly, occasionally commenting on his younger incarnation's energy and need for approval. As Federan plays him, the ferociously ingratiating young Peter is a trouper in short pants, whose abrasiveness is just that—abrasive—and a patent bid to win over the audience. These early scenes set the structure of the show: Jackman talks to the audience, a few encounters are staged between the actors, a song is sung, and then we move on to the next chapter in the Peter Allen Story. Bad home life and show-biz aspirations in Tenterfield give way to Allen leaving home, changing his last name, hooking up with Chris Bell (Timothy A. Fitzgerald), and hogging the camera as a last-minute replacement on "Australian Bandstand." Next up is Hong Kong, and Judy. At every step of the way, we are forced to confront Allen's pluck. Nothing, it seems—not his hardscrabble past,

not Dad blowing his brains out, not AIDS—will stop Peter's star from shining. He's Ann Miller in a Hawaiian shirt.

The scene in the bar at the Hong Kong Hilton provides one of the few fragments of dialogue that really work. Making himself vulnerable to Garland, Allen says, "I . . . I had a difficult childhood." She responds, "You're saying that with a straight face to *Judy Garland*? . . . I'll bet you haven't even had your stomach pumped yet." Allen or Garland fans will know what comes next: Garland spirits the Allen Brothers away. She gives them a job as her opening act and draws them into the travelling sideshow that is her life—and which constitutes the most interesting material in *this* show. In New York, Mama Garland introduces Peter to her teen-age daughter Liza Minnelli (Stephanie J. Block). The two fall in love, and they marry three years later. Liza wins a Tony (best actress for "Flora, the Red Menace") and an Oscar (best actress for "Cabaret"), while Peter has sex with a

great many men and parties hard with Liza. (They divorced in 1974.)

Like Jackman, Block has a difficult part to play, largely because Minnelli—her eyes, her hair, her weddings, her guest-star turns on "Larry King Live"—is still with us. We don't yet have the distance that would allow us to accept someone else in the role. To make things worse, in this production Block is treated as badly as a young actress can be. Her wigs and costumes (by Paul Huntley and William Ivey Long, respectively) make for a mean queen's version of Minnelli: shabby and cruel. Block does what she can with her underwritten and sentimental scenes, but only one rings true: Allen gets word that Garland has died. Liza is in rehearsal, surrounded by her dancers. Allen enters, stage left, and tells his wife that there's something he has to talk to her about in private. Looking around, Liza says, "You can say anything you want. This is family." Allen does an emotional double take.

Truth and illusion—where does it end for Liza, that Broadway (and Hollywood) baby? Where does it end for Allen? Following their divorce, he becomes more and more himself: a solo cabaret singer of note; a composer of such hits as "Don't Cry Out Loud" and "I Go to Rio"; the star of a one-man Broadway show; the first man to dance with the Rockettes, headlining at Radio City Music Hall in 1981; Australia's favorite son. At the same time, it becomes harder for us to distinguish between Allen's "true" self (which Jackman is trying to convey) and his public persona (which McKinley wants us to be amused by). Jackman was not a wrong choice for the role, but a misguided one. Just this side of overly hunky, he is a dream of sweetness. He does everything he can to sell the show, and the girls in the audience love him. What could be better than a straight man playing a gay one? But the production that swirls around him fights to undermine him. He is never allowed to build on Allen's quieter moments, and nearly all the other actors try to upstage him—as if they had better things to do than engage with the star. Is it that, in the end, the director and the playwright's faith in the character of Allen is a bit thin, as Allen's talent was? Jackman has the formidable task of playing a ghost better left to Heaven. ♦



Psillos

Hugh Jackman, as Peter Allen, wears his heart (and his lungs) on his sleeve.

LET YOURSELF GO

Is opera ready to dance again?

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Once again, a choreographer has taken on "The Rite of Spring"—Doug Varone, for the Metropolitan Opera's "Stravinsky" program—and once again the result is a trifling business compared with that epochal piece of music. Though Stravinsky composed "The Rite" as a ballet score—for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, in 1913, with Vaslav Nijinsky as the choreographer—dance-makers have reason to run like mad from it. Its rhythms are famously volatile: a sort of sonic rock fight, just what dancers don't need. And even if that were to seem an interesting challenge, a less interesting one is the ballet's intrinsic primitivism. The original production had to do with a tribe of prehistoric Slavs greeting spring. In Act I, these folk engage in auguries and games. Their Sage comes forth, and he kisses the earth. In Act II, to thank their god for renewing the fertility of the soil, the people offer him a sacrifice. A girl is selected, the so-called Chosen One, and in an ecstasy of terror, with the whole tribe watching, she dances herself to death.

This is a forthrightly brutal story, one that says life is food, sex, and death. And it was for that civilization-exploding message that "The Rite of Spring" was celebrated (and execrated) at its première. "This is a biological ballet," Jacques Rivière wrote. The dancers looked to him like "large revolving masses of protoplasm; germ layers, . . . placentas"—in other words, cells, driven solely by biological imperatives. Thanks to Darwin and Freud, this law-of-the-jungle theme was frequently sounded in Europe's vanguard art in the years before the First World War, but the purest ex-

ample was "The Rite." Nothing looked newer, more surprising.

Today, primitivism is the opposite of surprising. Loincloths? Not again! Its message may also seem untrue. Is this really a dog-eat-dog world? How do you explain relief workers? Then there is the question of the artist's intent. In the years leading up to Na-



Doug Varone's "Rite" is more primitive than Nijinsky's.

zism, German art was full of earth-kissing—celebrations of the soil, the tribe. When the primitive takes the stage, a lot of old machinery locks back into place, with what, for some people, may be a satisfying click. Concert audiences may or may not hear such principles operating in the score. The Stravinsky expert Richard Taruskin hears them, and deplores them. But music is not representational, and therefore its politics

are usually ambiguous. Dance, on the other hand, is always representational to some extent, because it shows us people, in action. And if, in a "Rite" ballet, what the people do has any relation to the original libretto, we are facing some problems.

None of this seems to have discouraged anyone. Apart from "The Nutcracker," "The Rite of Spring" may be the Western world's most choreographed piece of music. In a count done in 1992, it was found that, after Nijinsky, seventy-one choreographers had made ballets to Stravinsky's score. That's about one per year. Some of these "Rite"s—including the best one I ever saw, Paul Taylor's 1980 "Le Sacre du Printemps (The Rehearsal)"—have chucked the old libretto. Very many, however, have stuck to the basics of the 1913 story. The tribe may be Slavic or not, a girl may die or not (sometimes she just has to have sex), but most "Rite"s are muscly, tribal numbers, about how life is tough.

Doug Varone's version fits the mold. Indeed, it is more primitive than the original. From what we know about Nijinsky's choreography for "The Rite" (it's mostly lost, despite attempts at reconstruction), the dancing, like the music, was not just primitivist but modernist. Though the dancers may have quaked and stamped, they did so in angular postures, rigid lines. They were about as prehistoric as the women in Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)" made a few years before "The Rite," were African. Furthermore, their activity was only approximately narrative. More than story, it was dancing. Varone's "Rite," by contrast, is naturalistic. His dancers are really supposed to be prehistoric—"ape-like beings," as he told *Playbill*. They wear loincloths; they squat and grunt. And they never just dance. From start to finish, they do things, prehistoric things, under the guidance of their Sages. (Sensitive to the ballet's politics, Varone gives us two Sages, a man and a woman, and also a male-female pair of

Chosen Ones.) They go through a protracted routine involving a sheaf of grass. They brandish the grass, they stick their faces in it, they pound it, as if to make pesto. Then they bring out some wooden bowls and have a lengthy transaction with them. Finally, they must pick the victims for the sacrifice, but this, too, becomes a complicated matter, involving two cuts. First, six people are chosen, and they use the wooden bowls to play a game of hot potato, whereby the final two are selected. Then these two try to escape. They run and run. Eventually, the Sages grab them and bite them on the neck, and that's it. Spring has come, but never has it taken so long.

There was dancing here, in the style that Varone has honed over twenty-five years as a choreographer. It is a highly visceral style—we see the dancers' flesh, their laboring thighs—and, accordingly, it is a humanistic style. Varone is known as an artist with a heart. To the Met, those qualities may have recommended him as a person to take on "The Rite." But while his decency prevented him from giving us another glorification of force—insofar as his Chosen Ones protest, so does he—his naturalism sank him in the opposite pit: corniness. "The Rite of Spring" is first of all a rite. Varone's show is just a sad day at the campfire.

Still, in an indirect way, the piece is to the Met's credit. In the original, 1981 production of the "Stravinsky" triple bill—which also includes "Le Rossignol" and "Oedipus Rex"—"The Rite" was choreographed by Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, a former New York City Ballet dancer, who created a conservative piece notable only for David Hockney's gorgeous costumes. That the people at the Met forked over the money for a new choreographer (and, alas, for a new, less handsome set of costumes, again by Hockney) shows at least that they are thinking about the dancing on their stage.

Such concern has not always been in evidence. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, dance was central to opera, but already by the late seventeen-hundreds, with the new push for dramatic unity, opera composers had started to ask themselves

whether they needed a bunch of people interrupting their story to do a *chaconne*. As time went on, some also disdained to write the sort of music—with light textures, regular phrasing, a strong beat—that contemporary ballet technique required. Mozart made little place for dance in his operas; Wagner made almost none.

In many twentieth-century productions of older operas, the ballet music was dropped. Or, if it was kept, it was not necessarily honored. Over the years, the Met has now and then called on distinguished dance-makers (Frederick Ashton choreographed the beautiful "Rossignol" in the "Stravinsky" program), but generally it has contented itself with choreographers of the second or third rank, people who knew their place. If they didn't know it, they soon discovered it, by looking at the set design. Production after production at the Met is designed in such a way that if there is to be any dancing it will have to be done in a small space, and maybe on a staircase or a table. In the current production of "Eugene Onegin," the Act II waltz is hemmed in by a border of chairs; the dancers barely have room to jiggle in place. The Act III polonaise is not danced at all. This music, written to accompany a dance—a big court procession that will tell us what Tatiana has become since Act II, and why, therefore, she will refuse Onegin—is now used as background for Onegin as he dresses for the ball. To these great, pompous strains, replete with trumpets and drums, a man changes his pants.

Nevertheless, there are signs that someone at the Met is starting to take dance seriously. If the choice of Varone for "The Rite of Spring" did not work out, at least it wasn't a timid choice. Varone is a downtown modern-dance choreographer. For the Met, that is a stretch. Varone also supplied the dances for last season's new production of "Les Troyens," and there, though his style again looked a little sweaty under the gold proscenium, he came up with something more subtle. Another imaginative pick was Robert La Fosse, who in recent years has supplied rousing party dances for "The Great Gatsby" and "Die Fledermaus." He should be given a more ambitious assignment.

At New York City Opera, too, someone is paying attention to dance. Or Francesca Zambello was, when she directed the company's new "Alcina." (She also directed the Met's "Les Troyens.") She tapped Seán Curran, another downtown choreographer, and he did something wonderful with those poor wayfarers whom Alcina, a sorceress, has changed into beasts and trees. They looked like beasts and trees, yet still, with their arms up and their feet turned out, they were eighteenth-century gentlemen, doing a dance—a weird and poignant sight. If N.Y.C.O. goes on producing Baroque opera, with all that dance music, it will go on needing smart choreographers. I think, in fact, that the current fashion for Baroque opera—and specifically the dance-crammed productions of William Christie's *Les Arts Florissants*—is one of the forces that have got our regular opera-house directors worrying about choreography. Another crucial influence has been the "experimental"—and, in most cases, European-funded—opera directors. When the Met was forgetting about dance, Peter Sellars and Robert Wilson weren't. Then there are the recent opera productions directed by choreographers. After seeing Trisha Brown's thrilling version of Monteverdi's "L'Orfeo," or Mark Morris's tremendous, through-danced "Dido and Aeneas," some opera administrators may have gone home feeling *derrière-garde*.

If that is the case with the Met, there are two things it should look at. One is the silly free-for-all in Act II of "La Traviata," at Flora's fête. There is some fine Spanish dancing here (the choreography is by Maria Benitez, a flamenco specialist, and the lead dancer is the excellent Sara Erde), but amid the hubbub of toreadors and bulls and ballet dancers you can barely see it. The other emergency is the triumphal procession in "Aida," which looks like a Vegas floor show. "Aida" and "La Traviata" are two of the Met's most cherished operas; the house has lavished on them its finest singers, its most staggering design budgets. Yet smack in the middle of them are these feckless numbers. If I am right that the Met now does care about its dances, a little bit, it should do something about these right away. ♦

CREEP SHOWS

"In the Cut" and "Elephant."

BY DAVID DENBY

A blood-red New York sky at dusk, a sordid city of graffiti and trash piles, all photographed by a handheld camera that jiggles and stumbles like a drunken sailor about to hit the deck. "In the Cut," Jane Campion's adaptation of Susanna Moore's much praised 1995 thriller, is discordant and creepy right from the opening shots. On the soundtrack, someone sings "Que Será, Será," the number that Doris Day belted out at the climax of Hitchcock's "The Man Who Knew Too Much." In this arrangement, however, the anonymous vocalist is accompanied by an aimlessly wandering piano, which makes the song seem neurotic—full of doubt rather than defiance. "In the Cut" is the kind of urban thriller about sex and death that's often described as "disturbing," and it seems at first a strange project for Jane Campion, the director of the masterly erotic drama "The Piano." But no one can say that Campion, working with genre material—a mad killer terrorizing lower Manhattan—leaves her art behind. On the contrary, every frame of "In the Cut" reeks of conscious design. Campion's use of high-contrast color (Dion Beebe did the cinematography) makes the shadows a furnace black and the lighter shades glaring and harsh. We seem to be trapped in a lurid dreamworld in which the streets are always menacing and the corridors narrow and dangerous, as if the walls were closing in. "In the Cut" is completely controlled and all of a piece, and yet, apart from one performance, it's terrible—a thriller

devoid of incidental pleasures or humor, or even commonplace reality. The heroine, Frannie (Meg Ryan), a teacher and occasional writer, takes all sorts of risks, but, except for her spasmodic acts in a phony, tacked-on ending (which is not in the book), she never fights for herself. What's disturbing about the picture is not its blood tones but its mood of self-pitying haplessness.



Meg Ryan plays a woman stalked by a killer who may be a cop.

Frannie is being stalked by a killer who cuts women up into pieces, and she puts her faith in a homicide detective, Malloy (Mark Ruffalo), who may, in fact, be the killer. She's utterly vulnerable, and the emotional success of the movie depends on our finding her sympathetic. Yet nothing that Frannie does quite makes sense. A teacher of inner-city kids, she has her class read "To the Lighthouse." When they say they don't get it, is that their fault or hers? She meets an imposing-looking, highly emotional African-American student to discuss his work not in some

neutral place like Starbucks but in a lousy dive where prostitutes service casual clients in the basement. We get the point that Frannie is self-destructive, that she's lost and looking for danger, but the audience may grow impatient with a woman who can't walk down the street without stumbling or getting mugged or run over. For some reason, she keeps losing her shoes as well. As if all that weren't enough, she has a half sister, Pauline, who's an even bigger mess than she is and is played by—who else?—Jennifer Jason Leigh. As the two women sit around in a rubbishy apartment longing for love, philistine thoughts rise to the surface: Couldn't they at least tidy up a bit? How about putting a vase of flowers on the table?

There are people everywhere, of course, whose lives unaccountably slip into horror; and there's no reason that screwups can't be fit subjects for drama. Clint Eastwood, the screenwriter Brian Koppelman, and a talented group of actors have just proved as much in the great "Mystic River." But, even though "Mystic River" is about a malaise overtaking a community, one can see intimations of ordinary life in it. There's no ordinary life in "In the Cut," just art-thriller flourishes. The movie has been entirely prearranged for dreadfulness. This isn't true of Susanna Moore's novel. Working in a neo-hardboiled

style that she fine-tuned into elegance, Moore created a cool and dry first-person voice for Frannie. Moore is so skillful that she turned masochism into a hip form of defiance: "Do it to me," Frannie says, in effect. "See if I care." Moore worked with Campion on the screenplay, so presumably Frannie turned out the way she wanted, but she may not have realized how much of her compositional poise would be lost when that voice got transformed into overwrought camera rhetoric, a distorted color scheme, and the floundering of a charming but inadequate ac-

tress. Meg Ryan wears her hair long, light brown, and cut in bangs, in apparent homage to Jane Fonda in the 1971 thriller "Klute," but Fonda's character, Bree, a prostitute stalked by a killer, was smart—the combination of intelligence and passivity was what made her fascinating. Fonda's performance remains a classic. Meg Ryan has her pucker-lipped moue and her relaxed carriage and easy, swivelling neck, and she's bravely naked in a few scenes, but she doesn't have the range and power to make us overlook what's tiresome in Frannie's character. This woman is a ninny wandering through a maelstrom.

Only Mark Ruffalo emerges intact from the general disaster. Ruffalo, who was Laura Linney's wayward younger brother in "You Can Count On Me," has put on weight and looks a lot more substantial than he did a few years ago. A scraggly mustache brings out the handsomeness of his jaw and the light in his brown eyes. His Detective Malloy, flirting with Frannie in a bar, is coarsely direct about sex, but Ruffalo, speaking in his smoky-sleepy voice, utters his carnal inducements so mildly that one thinks that he might be putting Frannie on. He isn't. He's an urban primal man with a streak of gentleness, and he heats Frannie up so skillfully that she responds the minute he touches her. She then has to decide: is Malloy eager to sleep with her or to kill her, or both? Sexual excitement tinged with fear—it's an old thriller trope. Remember Joan Fontaine trembling when Cary Grant came up the stairs in Hitchcock's "Suspicion" and Glenn Close wondering about grouchy Jeff Bridges in "Jagged Edge" and (with the gender roles reversed) Al Pacino and Michael Douglas looking warily at their lovers

Ellen Barkin and Sharon Stone in "Sea of Love" and "Basic Instinct." For all the jangled film technique, the story is disarmingly familiar, and it's no fun watching Frannie get knocked from pillar to post. In the past decade, Campion has given us a heroine who is mute and has her finger cut off ("The Piano"), another who gets trapped in a disastrous marriage ("The Portrait of a Lady"), and now self-punishing, blood-soaked Frannie. I guess we get the point: a woman's lot is to be imprisoned and mutilated. But is that enough of a view for a talented director? The world that lies open before a filmmaker beckons with pleasure as well as pain.

In "Elephant," Gus Van Sant's fascinating, mysteriously lyrical meditation on the Columbine massacre, the director ignores the clarifying and intensifying syntax of standard Hollywood drama. The movie begins one morning with a boy retrieving his drunken father from somewhere and depositing him in his high school for a few hours while he goes to class. Who is this boy? We don't know at first. Soon, a student photographer intercepts a teen couple on their way to school and takes their picture. Once inside the building, Van Sant and his cameraman, Harris Savides, gently but persistently pad after these students, and others, one at a time, photographing casual encounters, sometimes recording the same encounter from one kid's point of view, then from another's, and, finally, from the point of view of someone merely passing by. In the end, Van Sant pulls the encounters together into a pattern of sorts. The multiple versions of the same moment suggest the utter contingency of disaster: some of these kids

turn in a certain direction and avoid the killers, others do not. For Van Sant, what matters is the paralyzing dailiness of school social life—gossip, flirtations, hazing—so he moves backward and forward in time, establishing states of being rather than a sequence of events. He punctuates the banal school scenes with beautiful shots of scudding clouds and a darkening sky, as if all eternity were contained in a passing moment when children die. And why does the massacre take place? Van Sant doesn't point to specific reasons. Violence, of course, is the "elephant" in the title—the force in the room that's so obvious no one can see it. Spiritual violence first, then physical violence. Grasping for some sort of significance, we note the vaguely factorylike ambience of the school's wide linoleum corridors, the cliquish gatherings and hostilities, and the loneliness of students who don't fit in. The killers, picked up by the camera well after the movie begins, have no ideas or words; they're so out of it they don't even seem angry. Without sorrow or exhilaration, they go into the school and begin shooting. These teen-agers, like all the others, are played by amateurs, who, lacking the interpretive skills of trained actors, cannot show us what they are feeling. In the end, this odd, beautiful movie is remote and more suggestive than satisfying—a coolly impassive film about catastrophe made at a time when some of us might prefer an attempt at explanation. And yet "Elephant" is something to see. It offers a dismaying whiff of mortality in the spaces between the girls' chattering remarks in the cafeteria and in the blank eyes of boys who feel alienated from everything except the guns they cradle so lovingly in their arms. ♦

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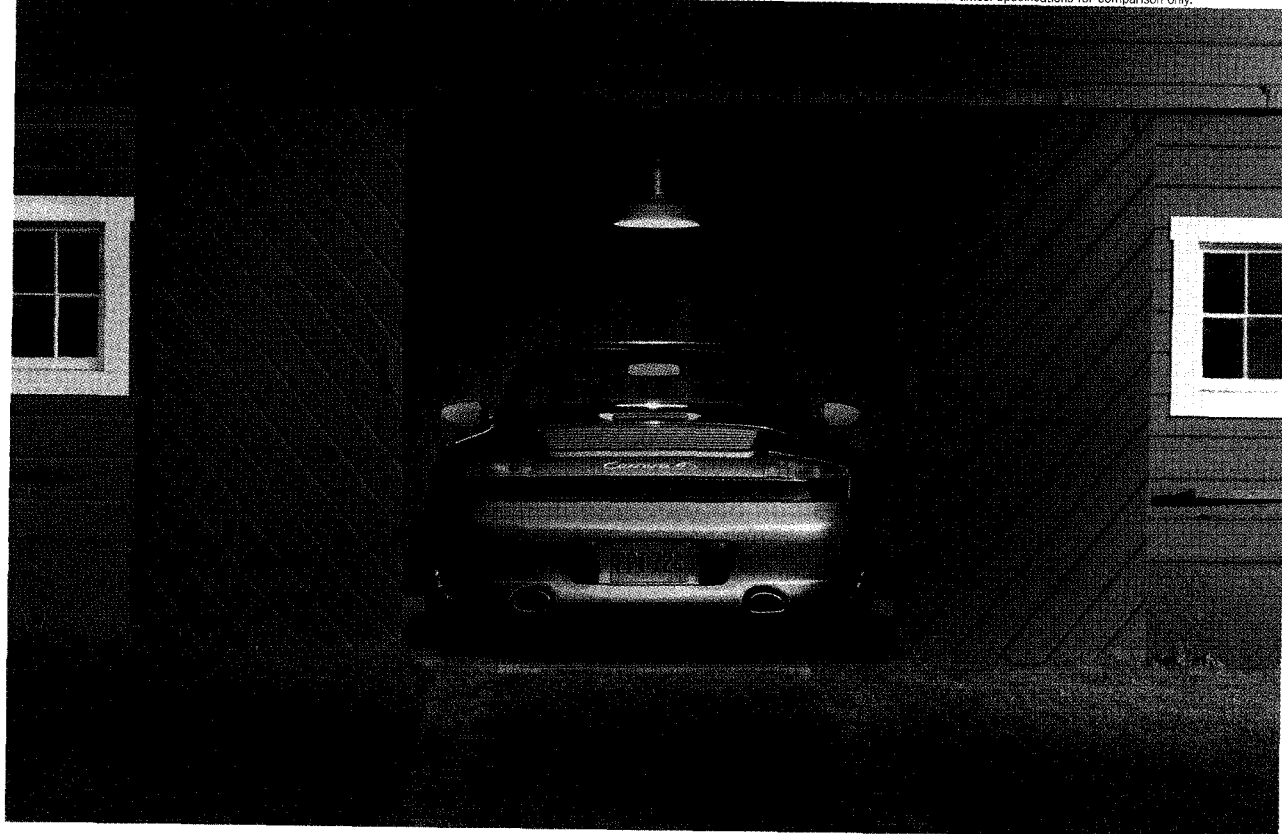
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